SELF-DIRECTED
LEARNING
CRITICAL PRACTICE

MERRYL HAMMOND   ROB COLLINS

NICHOLS/GP
PUBLISHING

Kogan Page, London   Nichols/GP Publishing, New York

LC5225
L42H36
1991

First published in 1991

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Kogan Page Limited
120 Pentonville Road
London N1 9JN

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A CIP record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 0-7494-0299-7

First published in the United States of America
in 1991 by Nichols/GP Publishing, 11 Harts Lane,
East Brunswick, NJ 08816, USA

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Data applied for.

ISBN 0-89397-407-2

Typeset in Montreal by
Consultancy for Alternative Education
Printed and bound in England by
Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

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Abbreviations

The first time a term is used in each chapter, we give it in full and put the abbreviation in brackets. However, if you are scanning or reading selected sections only, you may need to refer to this list occasionally.

CBE	Competency-Based Education
FLA	Final Learning Agreement
PHC	Primary Health Care
PLA	Preliminary Learning Agreement
PR	Participatory Research
SDL	Self-Directed Learning
TDL	Teacher-Directed Learning

Acknowledgements

We were first exposed to – and inspired by – SDL through Rob's involvement as a student in the self-directed Diploma in Adult Education, St Francis Xavier University, Nova Scotia, Canada. We later worked as members of a larger team in the Health Services Development Unit of the University of the Witwatersrand's medical school. There, our ideas about SDL were tested and shaped. This process continued in workshops we facilitated in the Consultancy for Alternative Education. The contributions made by participants of the various courses and workshops in which we have learned about critical SDL are immeasurable. This book is, in many ways, both about you and for you.

Some of the work in this book is adapted from Merryl's doctoral thesis approved by the Faculty of Medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand, and in this regard special recognition is due to John Gear and Jacques Kriel as her supervisors.

We also want to acknowledge David Boud, Malcolm Knowles, Ken Cox, Christine Ewan, Virginia Griffin, Don Brundage, Margaret Gayfer, David Morley and Wolfgang Leumer for their feedback on our initial course proposals for the Diploma in Primary Health Care Education; Tony Morphet, Griffiths Zabala, Angela Schaffer, John Aitchison, Dave Adler, Mike Simpson, and Clive Millar for feedback on the original self-assessment form for critical SDL co-ordinators which is now divided into smaller parts to open each chapter; and all the other people who helped and supported us in various ways while we learned about co-ordinating critical self-directed learning, among them Dipuo Mosuoe, Pat Garde, Andrew Truscott, Lucy Wagstaff, the late John Dobson, Luke Batdorf, Griffiths Zabala, Dale White, and the Ukukanya Trust Development Foundation for financial help while drafting this manuscript.

Finally, we acknowledge all the educational innovators whose writing has motivated us and to whom we refer throughout the book.

Foreword

Learning is about a great deal more than acquiring knowledge and developing skills. If learners do not also develop the capability of directing their own learning and acting on the world around them, they will be only partially educated, and limited in what they can do. This basic observation is often acknowledged, but educators continue to find it difficult to translate their good intentions into programmes which address these wider goals.

There are many reasons why educators are unable to respond to this challenge, not least of which is the problem of what to do. They do not have models and examples on which to draw. All around them are courses pursuing a 'set' syllabus, curriculum objectives determined by examining boards, classrooms in which the educator makes all the decisions, and textbooks which imply that all knowledge is contained within. Our lives are so constrained by the normal expectations of schools and colleges and universities, and the progression of subjects and assessments, that we can gain the mistaken impression that learning consists of these alone.

It is only when we are taken from our own, comfortable, environment that we can see that learning is often more vital, more exciting, more risky than fulfilling the expectations of others. This was the experience of Merryl Hammond and Rob Collins, the principal authors of this book.

They were employed by a university to design and conduct a course for rural health worker educators in a country riven with institutionalized racism, with poverty and exploitation, and with political tensions. Not surprisingly, many course participants were ill-prepared by their previous educational experience. Merryl and Rob could not follow the patterns with which they were familiar: they had to create an approach of their own which suited the circumstances. The stakes were high: graduates from the course would be educating primary healthcare workers whose actions would affect large numbers of people, influencing whether they received adequate health care, whether they lived or died.

This book has emerged from that experience. The authors have stood back and derived from it an approach to facilitating self-directed learning which may be widely applied and adapted to many ends. Most of us will never find ourselves in such a starkly delineated situation. We will often, though, be involved in assisting others to learn when their needs and the needs of the situation are more important than any predetermined content or strategy. This can occur in classrooms and formal educational institutions as well as in the community or workplace.

Ideas of self-directed learning have received increasing attention in the past 20 years and are having an impact on education and training at all levels. The notion that courses should be learner-centred and take account of the goals and desires of learners is not new. What is new is the repertoire of approaches available to educators to assist them in putting the ideas of self-directed learning into practice.

The writing of the late Carl Rogers has captivated the imagination and influenced the attitudes of many educators. Also from the United States, Malcolm Knowles has had a major influence and his *Self-Directed Learning: A Guide for Learners and Teachers* has been extensively used to introduce an approach in which learners prepare their own learning plans (contracts) which are negotiated and agreed with educators.

These authors have been criticized for exemplifying a typically North American, individualistic approach to learning – neglecting (at least in their earlier work) social and political dimensions. An alternative tradition, influenced by the work of the Brazilian educator, Paulo Freire, has provided examples of learners working and learning together to change their own conditions.

Merryl Hammond and Rob Collins have drawn from both these traditions to create their own approach which they term 'critical self-directed learning'. Like all good educators, they unashamedly take good ideas and strategies and re-work them in their own framework to produce an approach which breaks new ground and has a unique flavour of its own.

There is a refreshing quality about this book. Previous work on self-directed learning has tended to be quite uncritical, and critical approaches to adult learning have not been direct and transparent enough for readers to know what is being described and how these ideas might be applied. This book is very explicit: the authors do not obscure their discussions behind generalities and abstractions, they leave themselves healthily open to critique because there is no doubt about the methods they propose. Some familiar ideas are described in new ways and illustrations are given which challenge us to think anew about our own work. Some of the apparent contradictions from the conflicting traditions are carefully avoided and new ones posed for the reader to resolve.

Part of that new way of thinking is derived from the fact that the experiences underpinning the book have their origins in South Africa. Oppressive societies can provide the incubator for important ideas – the challenge of the manifestly unreasonable can sharpen thinking and create approaches which resonate with those who face difficulties themselves, but also have applicability in places which are seemingly less restrictive. Many of us in other countries have not had access to – or have chosen not to have dealings with – that country as part of the boycotts which have been imposed. As the communities in southern Africa start to confront their problems together, I hope we shall become aware of the impressive educational work that has been done there despite – or perhaps because of – the dominant regime and otherwise adverse conditions.

On a personal note, I am especially delighted to be able to provide this Foreword for the book. I was invited by the University of the Witwatersrand to be external examiner for the thesis which Merryl wrote on her educational work, but I refused this invitation as part of the academic boycott. This caused me considerable anguish at the time as I was aware that the thesis challenged the policies against which we were protesting. I believe that much good can be done by the publication of this book and I am pleased to support it.

David Boud
University of Technology, Sydney

Preface

We have four purposes in writing this preface: to explain what we mean by 'critical practice of self-directed learning (SDL)'; to describe how we have drawn on several educational streams in our thinking about and practice of critical SDL; to situate the context within which our ideas about critical SDL developed; and lastly, to provide an overview of how the book is organized.

What Do We Mean By The Critical Practice Of Self-Directed Learning?

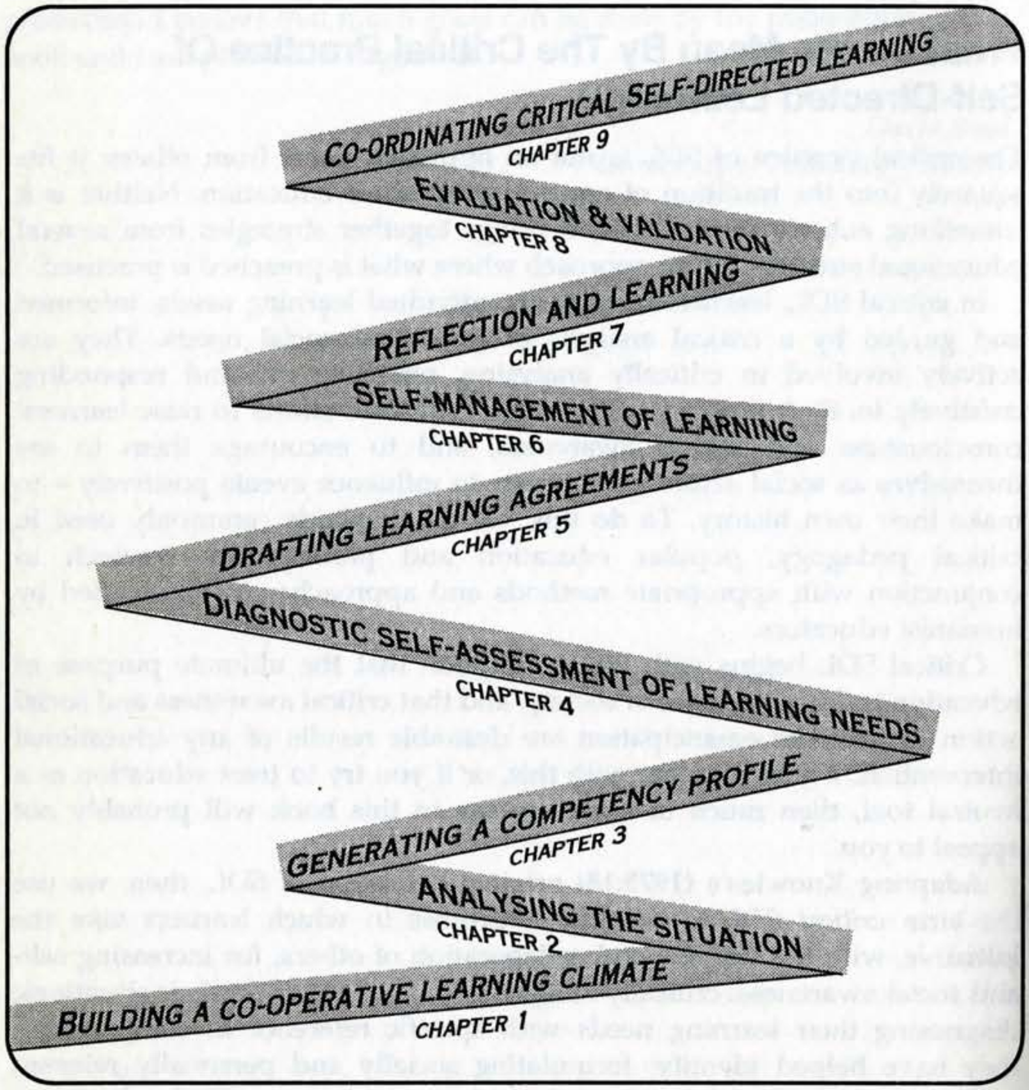
The critical practice of SDL is not an approach apart from others: it fits squarely into the tradition of emancipatory adult education. Neither is it something entirely new: rather, it brings together strategies from several educational streams into an approach where what is preached is practised.

In critical SDL, learners meet their individual learning needs, informed and guided by a critical analysis of prevailing social needs. They are actively involved in critically analysing, reflecting on, and responding creatively to, their situations. We make deliberate efforts to raise learners' consciousness and critical awareness, and to encourage them to see themselves as social actors with power to influence events positively – to make their own history. To do this, we use methods commonly used in critical pedagogy, popular education and participatory research in conjunction with appropriate methods and approaches recommended by humanist educators.

Critical SDL begins with the assumption that the ultimate purpose of education is the betterment of society, and that critical awareness and social action to promote emancipation are desirable results of any educational intervention. If you disagree with this, or if you try to treat education as a neutral tool, then much of what we say in this book will probably not appeal to you.

Adapting Knowles's (1975:18) original definition of SDL, then, we use the term *critical SDL* to describe a process in which learners take the initiative, with the support and collaboration of others, for increasing self- and social awareness; critically analysing and reflecting on their situations; diagnosing their learning needs with specific reference to competencies they have helped identify; formulating socially and personally relevant learning goals; identifying human and material resources for learning; choosing and implementing appropriate learning strategies; and reflecting on and evaluating their learning. The immediate goal of critical SDL is to help learners take greater control of their learning. Its ultimate goal is to empower learners to use their learning to improve the conditions under which they and those around them live and work. In this book, we focus on learners enrolled in accredited courses of study where their learning has to be formally validated, but the same principles could equally be applied for any adult learning projects undertaken independently of formal institutions.

The steps in critical SDL we have identified and found useful in practice are shown in Figure 1.


CO-ORDINATING CRITICAL SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING
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EVALUATION & VALIDATION
CHAPTER 8
REFLECTION AND LEARNING
CHAPTER 7
SELF-MANAGEMENT OF LEARNING
CHAPTER 6
DRAFTING LEARNING AGREEMENTS
CHAPTER 5
DIAGNOSTIC SELF-ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING NEEDS
CHAPTER 4
GENERATING A COMPETENCY PROFILE
CHAPTER 3
ANALYSING THE SITUATION
CHAPTER 2
BUILDING A CO-OPERATIVE LEARNING CLIMATE
CHAPTER 1

Figure 1 *Steps in critical self-directed learning (SDL)*

The major strengths of critical SDL which we discuss in detail in the book include:

- it promotes empowerment and liberation (of both educators and learners and also of others with whom they interact)
- it ensures that learning is relevant (both socially and personally) even in heterogeneous learning groups
- it meets conventional institutional demands about maintaining academic standards
- it prepares learners for continuing learning
- it promotes participation and co-operation as important educational and social attributes.

However, there are some potential problems which practitioners of critical SDL need to avoid:

- it may be opposed or abused by some educators
- it may initially be resisted by learners accustomed to teacher-directedness and/or a less critical approach
- evaluation and administration of critical SDL are particularly demanding tasks requiring openness and creativity.

Drawing From Different Educational Streams: Attempting A Synthesis

When we first considered implementing SDL in our work, we agreed with those who saw laissez-faire SDL as a potentially individualistic, even elitist educational approach. In many cases, self-directed learners pursue narrowly defined personal learning needs, taking no account of broader social issues or the roles of educators and learners as either change agents or perpetuators of the status quo in their society. As Brookfield says:

> ... self-direction as a concept runs the risk of being denuded of context and of coming to be viewed solely as a technique in much the same way as programmed learning is now conceived. (Brookfield, 1986:18)

We had reservations about SDL in the absence of a critical framework. However, by bringing together the mutually supportive aspects of several different educational approaches, we were able to address our concerns.

Paulo Freire's work in critical pedagogy and literacy provided a starting point. He emphasizes empowerment and liberation of learners and links this to social action to change conditions under which they live and work. Although his work concerns literacy, we felt that the same principles about helping learners 'find a voice', establishing an authentic dialogue, and overcoming learner-alienation could be applied in other settings. We subsequently learned about other popular educators and participatory researchers who build on Freire's work. While we were keen to adapt their ideas, we recognized the limitations of their methodologies in our context: we were working with learners in university and distance-education settings.

Many of the ideas for developing learner autonomy put forward by David Boud and his associates in *Developing student autonomy in learning* (1981, 1988) inspired us and helped us to be more creative in planning our work. His 1985 book, *Reflection: turning experience into learning* (and more recently, Mezirow's 1990 publication, *Fostering critical reflection in adulthood*) also had a major impact: we came to think of reflection as a distinct step in the critical SDL process (see Chapter 7).

Carl Rogers wanted to help learners experience 'freedom to learn' through personal growth. After taking part in workshops he facilitated, we tried to apply some of his ideas and methods in our facilitation of groups. The formal educational settings in which we worked demanded somewhat more structure and more predictable outcomes than a pure 'Rogerian' approach to learning would allow, but his influence was strongly felt.

Malcolm Knowles's work in SDL, specifically contract learning, gave learners the opportunity to diagnose learning needs and choose educational goals, strategies and evaluation techniques, while satisfying conventional institutional demands about maintaining academic standards. Also, learning contracts could be used in distance education – something we wanted to experiment with because it makes higher education more accessible to adult learners. But as we've mentioned, Knowles's approach to SDL had a drawback: insufficient emphasis on developing critical awareness and encouraging social action. From personal experience of being unsupported and isolated in the role of self-directed learners, we also felt that a much more active (but not controlling) role for SDL co-ordinators should be developed, and that a major part of this should be to build and maintain a co-operative learning climate and a collaborative, interdependent sense of community (see Chapter 1) in the learning group as a whole. We were also uneasy about the potential for SDL to be used in an uncritical way to meet learning needs which were merely individually-defined. We felt that critical social analysis combined with a competency-based educational (CBE) approach would address this problem.

CBE (see Chapter 3) provides learners with a chance to pace themselves, to keep their learning focused and relevant, and to develop the specific competencies they will need to function effectively in the real world. But we did not want to arbitrarily prescribe to learners what competencies they should achieve, and we were dissatisfied with the emphasis in the available CBE literature on technical competencies at the expense of a broader understanding of the social forces at work in any situation. CBE had not yet acknowledged the learner's role as a potential change agent.

Our goal then was to bring together the strengths of these different approaches without importing their weaknesses. The synthesis we have arrived at is what we call critical SDL. Whether you think we have over- or under-emphasized certain aspects of each approach will be a matter of opinion, depending on your own educational, social and political values. Whatever your conclusion, we hope that in reading this book you will be stimulated to find a synthesis that is personally meaningful, socially relevant, and practical.

The Context Within Which We Worked

Our ideas about critical SDL were informed by the larger socio-political and historical context in which we worked. Here we briefly describe how and why our concept of critical SDL evolved. This provides a background against which many of our personal reflections included in the book can be interpreted.

The major focus of our work in SDL has been in educational workshops we have convened under the auspices of the Consultancy for Alternative Education, as well as in initiating (during the mid-1980s) a part-time distance-learning course: the Diploma in Primary Health Care Education at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. Participants on this diploma course were nurses and doctors, blacks and whites, women and men. All were educators of primary healthcare workers; most worked in rural areas in underdeveloped 'homelands' where the health workers they were educating were responsible for providing the only available health services to villagers impoverished and oppressed under apartheid. Basic facilities (water supplies, sanitation, roads, communication etc) and services (education, health and social services) in these areas – and even in urban townships – were hopelessly inadequate compared with those enjoyed by whites and the compliant black elite.

The mid-1980s was a time of deep political repression in South Africa. Community and worker organizations opposed to the apartheid system were under constant threat of police harassment, detentions without trial, and state-sponsored violence. The government had virtually imposed martial law through succeeding 'States of Emergency'. It was to be several years before the release of Nelson Mandela, the unbanning of the African National Congress (ANC), and formal negotiations about political change between the white government and the ANC.

Despite the repression, many groups were working for change. New educational and organizational strategies were being proposed in all sectors. There was a growing mass of educators opposed to state-controlled education, and a national call from progressives for 'People's Education', 'education for liberation' and 'alternative education'. We were stimulated in our work by the ideas and debates current in the emerging organizations of educators working for change. In the health sector, innovations to establish community-supportive (rather than oppressive) health services were under way; pressure was being exerted on the government to open health facilities to people of all races; and demands for a more equitable distribution of health (and other social) resources were becoming more difficult for the government to ignore.

But organized nursing and medical education, with only a few exceptions, paid little or no mind to these changes or to the health effects of the unacceptable social conditions described above. Indeed, most health worker educators studiously avoided raising any questions about these issues. Those who did were dismissed as trying to bring 'politics' into the supposedly neutral field of education. In our work, it was a major objective to understand and explain the social, economic and political determinants of ill-health, and to work to change institutions and attitudes which perpetuated those determinants.

Those of us opposed to the oppressive status quo had to develop new strategies to address the issues which mainstream institutions ignored. We had to help those with whom we worked – be they in rural women's groups, workers' co-operatives, trade unions, or colleges and universities – to analyse the factors that produced the circumstances in which they found themselves and to act to change what they could. In our work with learners in higher education, SDL with a critical focus provided us with an approach that was philosophically consistent with our broader socio-political values.

It strikes us now that although it was a major feature of our work to encourage learners to use new insights to take appropriate action, this action component is under-emphasized in the book. We also fail to discuss all the simultaneous 'extra-curricular' work that committed educators have to take to build new structures and social movements. This point is best expressed in a quotation:

> Doomed to failure from the start are the efforts of those who attempt to create emancipatory education with no vision of the future grounded in present or emerging events and organizations.... Even with vision, the substitution of new theories for the old, fatalistic ones is simply not enough. At the same time, there must be structures at hand through which action can be undertaken – a reform movement, political party, community organization, or a social movement – or the potential for developing such structures. It is not merely the mind, dulled into acquiescence by an atrophied imagination, that blocks liberating, transformative action. It is concrete situations, structures, and organizations that maintain oppression. Only in creating equally concrete alternatives to these does liberation occur. The task is never simply educational. While education is critical to social transformation, it is not decisive. (Heaney & Horton, 1990:87)

This book focuses on educational theories and strategies rather than the extra-educational work and action taken by us, the contributing authors, or the learners with whom we all worked. However, that work and action is, in the end, what really counts. Without it, even the most elegant educational innovations and interventions are of little effect.

Overview Of The Contents And Process Of This Book

We believe that educators should share educational control with learners, but how can this be done in a book? First, we encourage you to build on your past experiences and to use independent inquiry and self-evaluation. We include questions and issues for you to consider, periodic reviews, practical exercises for adapting and applying new ideas in your own situation, and detailed references to resources you may find useful. At various points we encourage you to reflect critically on your own situation and on your practice as an educator. Similarly, we and the contributing authors try to share our own weaknesses and mistakes in a series of reflective self-critical accounts throughout the book.

Second, we try to share control by means of the diagnostic self-assessment exercises at the start of each chapter. These give you a chance to assess your existing strengths and weaknesses in a particular area so that you can focus and direct your subsequent reading of this book and your reflection more closely. It also provides you with a preview of the material included in each chapter, and a baseline for evaluating your learning once you have finished the chapter and return to re-assess your competencies. In addition, working through this phase of self-assessment will provide you with first-hand experience of one of the major steps in the critical SDL process we describe. Having experienced it for yourself, you will be in a better position to decide whether it is worth introducing to learners with whom you work.

The order of the chapters follows the main steps in critical SDL as we have applied it (see Fig 1). Each chapter is similarly structured, starting with a preview, self-assessment exercise and then critical overview of relevant concepts. The rationale for and potential limitations of introducing the particular step are then considered. Finally, practical strategies for introducing each step are suggested. Detailed references are provided throughout in case you want to read further. Where possible, we provide brief extracts from and reflections on problems we and other educators have faced in practice. Most of the extracts relate to community and health worker education in South Africa: these are the fields in which the contributing authors work and where we have had most experience. However, the principles illustrated and lessons drawn can also be applied in other fields and other regions. The reason for our focus on practical strategies is that many educators who espouse progressive ideals and who include progressive content in their work, nevertheless use conventional educational processes in their practice. It is a constant challenge for all educators to bring our theory and our practice into closer alignment.

The tensions between teacher-directed learning and learners directing their own learning are still very much with us. In instances where successful innovations in progressive adult education have been implemented, they have too often subsequently been overturned by unsupportive faculty or administrators. The honeymoon period for learner control in higher education is over. There is still a long way to go before it is generally accepted in educational institutions that learners can and should be more in control of their learning. We are now left with the tasks of demonstrating that learner control over learning can work in practice, and of supporting educators and learners who are serious about change, both within educational institutions and in society at large.

Merryl Hammond and Rob Collins
Montreal, December 1990

Chapter 1

Building A Co-operative Learning Climate

> ... the vindicating superiority of those who do the enlightening over those who are to be enlightened is theoretically unavoidable, but at the same time it is fictive and requires self-correction: in a process of enlightenment there can only be participants. (Habermas, 1973:40)

Chapter Preview

By building a co-operative learning climate we aim to develop an open, interdependent atmosphere in the learning group – one which is both accepting and challenging; one which is most conducive to meaningful, deep learning; one which encourages learners to critically examine themselves, their work and their potential roles as change agents in the context of social, economic and political issues both inside and beyond the educational sector. We find the building of such a climate to be a fundamental step in opening our minds and our hearts; it also improves our chances of reaching our greatest potential as critical self-directed learners and as facilitators of the self-directed learning of others. We accordingly consider building a co-operative learning climate to be the first step in the critical self-directed learning (SDL) process. Once such a climate has been established, participants can be encouraged to analyse their situations, and then to plan, implement and evaluate their learning as we describe in subsequent chapters.

In this chapter, our discussion is guided by three questions:

- What are the reasons for and potential problems of building and maintaining a co-operative learning climate?
- What are the essential features of a co-operative learning climate?
- What strategies will help achieve these features in practice?

Self-Assessment

Because this chapter deals with several aspects of the learning climate, we have split up the self-assessment exercise, starting each section with part of it. The broadly-phrased exercise below provides an overview so you can decide which sections will be most useful to you. There are three columns for you to rate yourself in the self-assessment exercises. We suggest that you use the first column before you start reading, and the second one after your reading – thus 'measuring' your learning. The third column is for a later re-assessment if you decide to read more about learning climates, perhaps using some of the resources we refer to. Please use a rating scale of 1-5 where 1 indicates that you feel very *unsure of an aspect, and 5 indicates that you feel very confident and/or competent. Clearly, the higher your score, the less you need to improve. Priority can be given to items you rated low.*

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

- explain what I mean by a co-operative learning climate
- discuss the rationale for and potential problems of trying to build a co-operative climate
- express my 'learning climate philosophy'
- attend to the *physical* aspects of the learning climate
- build and maintain a co-operative *psychological* climate
- build and maintain a co-operative *social* learning climate
- build and maintain a co-operative *intellectual* climate
- build and maintain a co-operative *administrative* climate

My additional ideas about the learning climate:

Total:

Each of the items in the self-assessment is discussed in the sections below. Depending on your ratings, you may want to skip to a section on which you have rated yourself low.

Overview: Co-operative Learning Climate

What Is A Co-operative Learning Climate?

As we use the term here, a co-operative learning climate is one which is consistently democratic, open, collaborative, challenging and critical but also non-threatening. Here, learners and facilitators are equal participants (Habermas, 1973:40) and stand in a 'subject-to-subject relationship to one another' engaging in an 'authentic dialogue' (Freire, 1970b:vii, 12). Such a climate has major implications for the role of facilitator, and we agree with Brookfield:

> This concept [of facilitation] rejects the equation of facilitation with a nondirective attempt to serve as a resource person to learners who are essentially in total command of their learning activities. Instead it argues that facilitating learning is a transactional drama in which the personalities, philosophies, and priorities of the chief players (participants and facilitators) interact continuously to influence the nature, direction, and form of the subsequent learning. (Brookfield, 1986:viii)

Different terms (learning environment, learning milieu, classroom climate) are used in the literature and authors make different emphases. Most focus on the social relations in a learning group – the nature and quality of interactions between learners and teacher, and among learners themselves. Others extend the idea to include psychological and physical conditions:

> [The learning milieu] is the social-psychological and material environment in which students and teachers work together. [It] represents a network or nexus of cultural, social, institutional, and psychological variables. These interact in complicated ways to produce, in each class or course, a unique pattern of circumstances, pressures, customs, opinions, and work styles which suffuse the teaching and learning that occur there. (Parlett & Dearden, 1977:14-15)

While agreeing with this definition, we would add that the intellectual and administrative climates should also be considered, together with a broad 'learning climate philosophy'. Each of these elements is discussed later in this chapter.

Educators committed to building a co-operative learning climate should:

1. become critically aware of how educational oppression – in its subtle and unsubtle forms – usually operates;
2. help learners establish altered power relations in the learning group;
3. design educational experiences and administrative arrangements which are genuinely co-operative;
4. behave in an open and facilitating way in the learning group, and encourage learners to do so too.

If one or more of these conditions is weak or absent, the learning climate will almost certainly revert to being learner-oppressive and competitive, and the chances of critical SDL occurring are greatly reduced.

Why Build A Co-operative Learning Climate?

Before reading our ideas below, why do you think educators should try to build a co-operative learning climate?

Learners and educators are freed

The analogy from political discourse which views teachers as oppressors, and learners as oppressed is useful here (see Freire, 1970a:42). Boud echoes the theme that oppressors are oppressed by their own actions, and will remain so until those whom they oppress are liberated:

> By creating a rigid and unresponsive structure [teachers] can severely inhibit student self-directedness and establish an unhealthy dependency which not only turns students away from learning in its wider context, but which diminishes the teacher as a person. (Boud, 1981a:17)

Educators committed to justice and personal freedom from oppression can be more consistent in their practice if they build a co-operative learning climate rather than perpetuating or tolerating a conventional learning climate with its stated and unstated assumptions of teachers and the teaching institution being in complete control. Liberation for us as facilitators comes when we stop taking responsibility for the learning of everyone else, and start taking responsibility for our own learning instead.

While personal liberation for learners and educators is a worthy goal to strive for, it would be a lost opportunity to stop there. As we see it, the ultimate purpose of building a co-operative learning climate is to provide a basis for experimentation with and critical reflection on alternative power relations. The lessons learned at this individual level in a learning group help develop critical awareness of oppressive power relations in the larger society. Although personal liberation in learning does not necessarily lead to critical awareness and action in other spheres, learners who take charge of their own learning are more likely to become active controllers of their lives in other situations. They may resist subsequent attempts to oppress them and be more committed to showing others the benefits of each person taking greater personal control rather than either controlling others or being controlled by them.

A co-operative climate eases participants into new roles

> Faced with the demands of a self-directing and self-achieving learning role, persons (both teachers and students) react with a complex range of defensive behaviours, which is a measure of the depth of transformations required.... Much more examination of this role transformation process is required to develop practical aids to help learners and educators cope with it. (Hadley, 1981:145)

Learners are more likely to resolve their initial fears and doubts in a climate of mutual trust and acceptance. Likewise, educators who feel unsure about their new roles as SDL co-ordinators can at least relax, be themselves, and draw support from learners if the climate is co-operative. *(Griffin, 1977:13; Hammond, 1985a:21, 23; Knowles, 1980:45-9; Potts, 1988:133-4; Shelton, 1981:167; Stanton, 1988:125-31; Tough, 1981:39-40)*

A co-operative climate promotes effective learning and reflection

> The beliefs, feelings and assumptions of teachers are the air of a learning environment; they determine the quality of life within it. When the air is polluted, the student is poisoned, unless, of course, he holds his breath. (Postman & Weingartner, 1969:43)

Research shows that students who feel anxious and threatened tend to use an ineffective 'surface approach' to learning (superficial, rote-learning) rather than a 'deep approach' in which meaning is constituted and links are made with past experience and prior knowledge. A non-threatening climate can thus be crucial in promoting effective learning. Moreover, in a co-operative climate, learners participate more freely in decisions about what, when and how learning will take place. This in turn ensures that their learning is more relevant than if the educator arbitrarily makes these decisions. *(Fransson, 1977; Marton & Saljo, 1976)*

We discuss reflection in Chapter 7. Here, we only mention that the chances of genuine reflection occurring are much greater in a climate where learners and facilitators feel accepted and non-defensive; open to risk-taking, learning and feedback; where dissent is not merely tolerated but encouraged; where emotional as well as intellectual responses are valued; and where there is a balance between high-energy and low-energy moments. *(Davies, 1987; Goodman, 1984:13; Khan & Weiss, 1973:777-8)*

A co-operative climate encourages self-directed learning (SDL)

It is clear from the above that a co-operative learning climate is crucial in a self-directed course, where learners take greater control over their own learning, and facilitators act as resource people rather than 'teachers'. Although we know of SDL courses where little or no time is spent developing a co-operative learning climate, the 'independence' of participants can too readily turn into isolation and disillusionment with SDL as a whole. We are convinced that a co-operative climate provides the ideal foundation for critical SDL, and that the time invested in building and maintaining such a climate is fully justified by the outcomes.

Did you think of other reasons to add? Having considered the rationale for building a co-operative climate, we now focus on potential problems you may want to avoid in doing so.

Problems To Avoid

What problems may emerge when you try to build a co-operative learning climate?

Inability or resistance to change

Some educators have a mechanistic, superficial approach to climate-building and want to create the appearance but not the reality of equal relationships. We have to be serious about wanting learners to 'find their own voice' (Freire, 1970b:3-4).

> You want him who was a slave yesterday to be a man? Then begin to treat him always as a man and the greatest step forward will already have been made. (Gramsci in Entwistle, 1979:128)

Others feel that learners would be too shocked if suddenly exposed to a different learning climate. They intend to introduce change later on, but a suitable time never seems to come. We find the best time to expose learners to the kind of learning climate we value is from the outset. On the other hand, some educators say they do not want to 'shock' learners initially; they are just using this as an excuse to do nothing: they never intend to change the conventional power relations in their learning groups at all.

Even if we have good intentions and a strong desire to behave differently, we may lack the skills required to change our behaviour or even the awareness that we are behaving inappropriately. This explains the common paradox: an educator who speaks progressively, but behaves oppressively. Argyris (1982) refers to this as a gap between our 'espoused theories' and our 'theories-in-use'.

So much for educator-related problems and resistance. External resistance to change may come from two sources. First, learners accustomed to playing the educational games of TDL – whether or not they are aware of playing them – may resist behaving openly and honestly with educators or peers. *(Powell, 1988:118)*

> ... worker-students react to college and other official moments of society with a highly armored, self-protective suspicion. Wary of teachers, even benign or radical ones, they may simply choose not to co-operate with democratic pedagogy. (Shor, 1980:34)

Second, and equally worrying, some colleagues may feel threatened by your attempts to build alternative relationships and sabotage your work. They may try to get you to conform by accusing you of having 'discipline problems', of 'lowering academic standards', or encouraging 'unhealthy familiarity'. We discuss ways of overcoming opposition from colleagues in Chapter 9.

Don't take it for granted

How to build a co-operative climate is a generally neglected topic in the literature. The assumption is often that a positive climate will automatically develop when a learning group assembles. Nothing could be further from the truth. Learners come with expectations and fears learned in authoritarian relationships in schools, voluntary associations and the family. And educators come with a lifetime of inappropriate socialization which will always nudge – if not push – them towards an authoritarian, dominant role. If the cycle of learner-passivity and educator-dominance is to be broken, the educator must plan and implement specific interventions to create an alternative learning climate.

Moreover, a learning climate is constantly created and re-created. It is not simply established once and for all. A facilitator may succeed in breaking through the initial barriers which place learners in an alienated, dependent position (what we mean by 'breaking the ice'), but these barriers may re-form (just as ice re-forms) and need to be re-broken and kept broken in an active process of building and maintaining a co-operative climate. We discuss this further in the section about the social climate later in this chapter.

Insincerity and imposition

Insecure educators may expect learners to take risks before they themselves are willing to do so. Learners become suspicious if they sense the educator is insincere. Contrived efforts are worse than no effort at all. *(Anh & Higgs, 1985:4; Griffin, 1977:14; Rogers, 1970:56, 67-8)*

Educators may be so accustomed to making arbitrary decisions that they try to change the learning climate without prior discussion with learners. The 'educational games' we have all learned to play will continue to be played unless educators and learners share an understanding of those games and a commitment to changing the rules. Learners need and deserve some mental preparation to adapt to an alternative climate. *(Ferrier et al, 1988:169; Quinn, 1980:302-3)*

'Nice feelings' are not enough

> [Good facilitation] does not mean, however, that educational encounters are characterized by some kind of universal bonhomie or false camaraderie under which fundamental differences are buried. (Brookfield, 1986:13)

Many educators limit themselves to maintaining 'nice feelings' among group members and fail to allow for critical thought, dissent, or challenge in the group. Isn't this a perversion of the concept of a co-operative learning climate?

> The problem is how does one gain the students' trust and at the same time challenge students to go beyond their everyday, taken-for-granted experiences and perceptions? (Goodman, 1984:13)

Some awkward situations may occur

When educators get beyond the superficial stage of 'nice feelings' they can expect some challenging interactions and even confrontations in the group. The potential for real learning and growth is considerable, provided these situations are sensitively facilitated.

Learners may become self-conscious

Ideally in a co-operative learning climate, everyone – the facilitator included – becomes more aware of themselves and others in the group. The emphasis on feelings and group process (reflecting on who is participating actively; who dominates and so on – see section about the social climate below) may be foreign to many. Those with less confidence may initially feel so self-conscious that they can't participate naturally in the group. *(Rogers, 1970:57)*

'Too much process, not enough content'

Some educators fear that the time taken to build and maintain a co-operative learning climate may leave too little time to 'cover the content' of the course. However, one of the main objectives for building a co-operative climate is to prepare learners for a more independent, self-directed learning process in which they can use their past experience, their peers, the facilitator and other people and materials as learning resources. The notion of the educator needing sufficient time 'to cover the content' is not consistent with this scenario.

Did you think of other potential problems to avoid when building a co-operative learning climate?

Components Of A Learning Climate: A Model

To conclude this section overviewing the concept of a co-operative learning climate, we use the analogy of a pyramid to explain how the different components of a learning climate ideally complement and support each other.

In the rest of this chapter, we discuss strategies to build and maintain a co-operative climate. We have classified strategies under the familiar headings of physical, social and psychological climates, but have separated out three other categories as well: the intellectual and administrative climates, and an overall 'learning climate philosophy'. In Figure 2, we use the analogy of a pyramid to illustrate the way we think about these aspects of a learning climate. The 'learning climate philosophy' forms the base, or foundation, and the other components each comprise one of the sides of the pyramid.

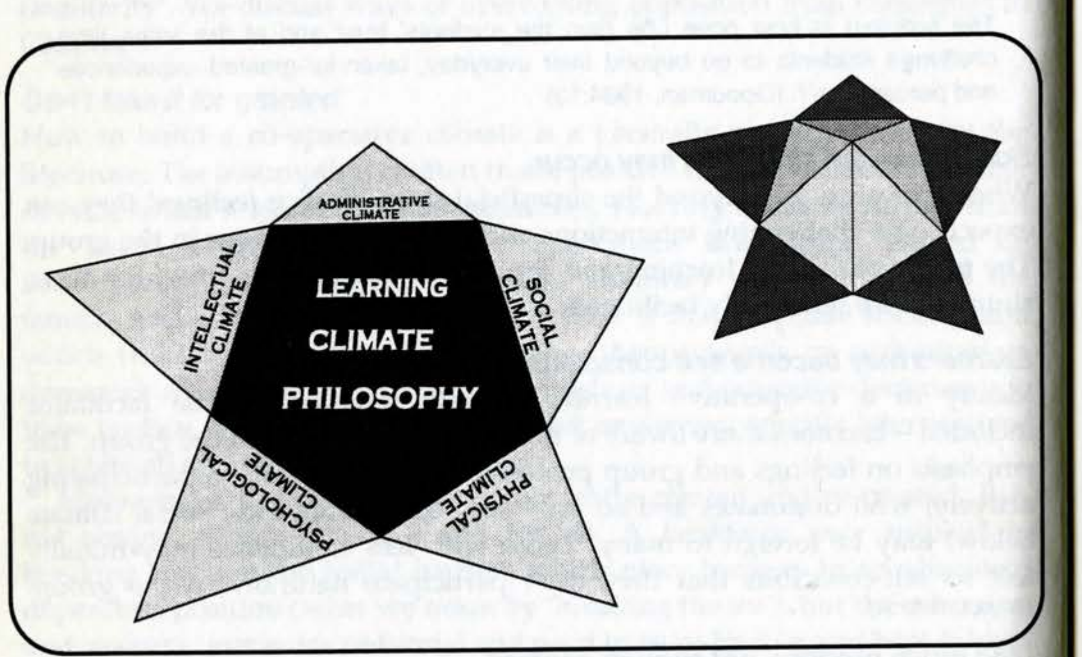

Figure 2 *Components of a learning climate*

In the next six sections, we discuss the approaches and methods recommended in the literature and those which we have used to build a co-operative learning climate with respect to each of the components included in Figure 2. Before continuing, you may want to complete the periodic review below.

Periodic Review

1. How would you explain the difference between a conventional and a 'co-operative' learning climate to a colleague?
2. Which of the rationales we mentioned or you added would you use to try to convince reluctant colleagues of the need to let you experiment with building a co-operative learning climate? Which would you use to explain your reasons to members of the learning group?
3. Which potential problems we mentioned or you added are most likely to occur in your setting and why? In each case, how might you prevent or overcome the problem?

Developing A Learning Climate Philosophy

Developing a comprehensive and consistent 'learning climate philosophy' (or theory) is fundamental if we hope to build and maintain a co-operative learning climate in practice. We represent it as the base of the pyramid in Figure 2 because it will determine whether all the other components join together and complement each other or whether parts of them get adopted uncritically, insincerely or inconsistently.

Self-Assessment: Learning Climate Philosophy

Please see suggestions for how to use a self-assessment exercise at the start of this chapter.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

- explain what I mean by a learning climate philosophy
- describe the relationship between my social and political philosophies and my educational and learning climate philosophies
- identify the features I consider essential in a co-operative learning climate, and make these explicit to learners
- help learners to reflect critically on the group's learning climate and to contribute to its establishment and maintenance
- use appropriate strategies to develop a coherent learning climate philosophy in a learning group including:
  - setting objectives about the kind of climate I value
  - encouraging reflection on the learning climate
  - evaluating the learning climate periodically

My additional ideas about a learning climate philosophy:

Total:

What Is A Learning Climate Philosophy?

Some authors either do not refer to the learning climate at all or do not seriously address the issue of building and maintaining a positive climate. Others, recognizing the centrality of the learning climate in determining what happens in a learning situation, have made this a major focus of their work. Most authors lie somewhere between these two positions: you have to read carefully to find the odd reference to some aspect of building a learning climate. The practice of developing a 'learning climate philosophy' – as part of a broader educational philosophy – has not been encouraged. In our experience, unless co-ordinators have formulated some guiding principles about the kind of learning climate they consider desirable and why, and unless specific steps are taken to build and maintain that kind of climate, it is unlikely to develop spontaneously or be enduring.

As we use the term here, a learning climate philosophy concerns the kind of climate – physical, psychological, social, intellectual and administrative – you consider ideal, and why. We believe educators should develop a specific 'learning climate philosophy' as part of their more general educational philosophy, and that they can then take more rational, active steps to build and maintain an appropriate climate.

There is a strong link between the learning climate philosophy and the social philosophies espoused by both co-ordinators and individual course participants. Whether their views are generally conservative, humanistic, liberal, or radical will largely determine the kind of learning climate philosophy they hold. Educators with radical views are more likely to have progressive learning climate philosophies and may try to act in accordance with them. On the other hand, educators unconcerned with issues of social, economic and political oppression outside the educational situation are unlikely to develop progressive learning climate philosophies and act consistently with them. A progressive philosophy will not, of course, guarantee progressive educational practice, but it will increase the likelihood of it.

Many of the behaviours evident in the physical, psychological, social, intellectual and administrative climates – discussed in the following sections – are influenced, either consciously or subconsciously, by this concept we have referred to as the learning climate philosophy.

Before reading further, what strategies could help you and the learners with whom you work develop a clear philosophy about the learning climate?

Strategies To Develop A Learning Climate Philosophy

We discuss three strategies we and some contributing authors have used to place the building of a co-operative learning climate high on our list of priorities; to make the concept explicit to participants; to provide opportunities for them to critically reflect on the options and start developing their own personal learning climate philosophies; and finally, to encourage them to practise consistently with their philosophies and to help us become more consistent in our educational practice. Helping participants to develop their broader educational, social and political philosophies – which we argue will affect their learning climate philosophies – is discussed in Chapter 2.

Set objectives about the learning climate

The first step is to be explicit about the kind of learning climate you want to build. Stephen Knight and his colleagues, for example, set a specific objective about the learning climate for the orientation period of a course for South African primary healthcare (PHC) workers:

> **Objective About The Learning Climate Set By Stephen Knight And Colleagues**
>
> To create a positive climate for learning during the course by:
>
> - breaking down barriers which usually exist between learners and educators; nurses and doctors; learners and fellow learners; and (in South Africa) blacks and whites;
> - creating a feeling of mutual trust, support, and humanity between learners and educators.

Once we have clarified the kind of learning climate we want to build, we share our ideas with course participants before the course starts, either in the official course brochure, or in an introductory document mailed to applicants. We then schedule a group discussion to clarify issues, answer questions, and consider input and changes suggested by participants. This early process of dialogue in itself helps to build the kind of co-operative climate we value.

Encourage reflection on the concept of a learning climate

The extract below describes one way we encouraged participants to reflect on different types of learning climates. We were working with a group of South African health worker educators who were responsible for co-ordinating educational programmes.

> **Helping Learners Reflect On The Learning Climate**
>
> One session in the orientation period was a discussion initiated with a role-play in which a student nurse was too intimidated to ask questions and get assistance from her co-workers. A patient was left to suffer unnecessarily as a result of the nurse's fear. Participants were asked to discuss first what they had seen happening in the role-play, and then why they thought we had felt it important to address this issue in the group. It was clear that we were hoping to build a climate in which we could all feel free to use each other as resources for support and for learning, and in which questions should be seen as a sign of thoughtfulness, not ignorance. This helped participants to think about alternative learning climates, and to start making conscious choices about how they would like to contribute to building a co-operative climate on the course. They also started thinking about

how they might facilitate building alternative climates in their own work as educators.

This session provided an introduction to the issue of co-operative learning climates, but would not have been sufficient in itself to change the old habits we – learners and educators alike – brought to the situation. We felt that we all needed some concrete, practical ideas about how we could build and maintain a co-operative learning climate. A major section of the competency profile (see Chapter 3) generated by participants was thus concerned with these specific competencies. The concept of a learning climate was no longer a nebulous one: we could now all list concrete actions (eg relate to learners as adults and equals; take their feelings, requests and feedback seriously; avoid value-judgements) that we could take to ensure that the learning climate in our group became and remained co-operative.

Evaluate the learning climate periodically

If you are serious about changing and improving the learning climate, you will evaluate it from time to time. It is not enough to raise the issue of the learning climate at the start of a course, and then ignore it. We find it valuable to allocate specific sessions later on for 're-breaking the ice', and to evaluate these as well. If you have previously set objectives about the learning climate, this makes evaluation simpler.

Extract From Evaluation Form Designed By Stephen Knight

(Learners were asked to use a 1-5 scale for each item. The forms were completed at the end of their orientation period at the start of the course.)

- Do you feel that there is mutual trust between you (the learners) and me (the facilitator)?
- Do you feel I relate to you as adults and equals?
- Do I treat you as an individual?
- Do I show care and concern for you?
- Do I encourage you to reveal yourself as a full person with other interests, fears and hopes?
- Do I reveal myself as a full person?
- Have I helped you to relax and enjoy the learning sessions?
- Do I show respect for your ideas, values and beliefs?
- Am I open to being challenged?
- Do I give each person a chance to participate?
- Do I listen more than talk?
- Do I encourage you to ask questions and express yourselves freely?
- Do you feel that we are all learners and educators together?
- Have I helped you to take control of as many decisions as possible?
- Do I respond to constructive criticism?
- Do I show enthusiasm? (List continues.)

We were amazed both by Steve's courage in asking the questions, and also by the frank responses he got. In many groups, we would have expected polite, not-quite-believable replies, but Steve's efforts to build a co-operative climate were sufficiently successful – after only a few weeks of working with the group – to ensure that he got honest and useful feedback about these sensitive issues. Consider the effects it must have on the learning climate to have a facilitator who is open enough to ask these kinds of questions about her/his effect on the learning climate.

Did you think of additional strategies to develop a clear learning climate philosophy in your learning groups? The aim is to help participants see the building of a co-operative learning climate as a crucial first step in any educational work, and as an aspect requiring attention throughout the duration of their course. In the next five sections, we discuss concrete strategies educators can use to build and maintain a co-operative physical, psychological, social, intellectual, and administrative climate.

The Physical Climate

We all know that the physical conditions under which learning occurs can have a major impact on the quality and quantity of learning. Yet how often are some of the basic details overlooked? Although some amazing learnings can happen in the most unlikely places, as a general rule educators would do themselves and learners a favour if they put more energy into making learning venues comfortable, attractive and conducive to working, sharing and relaxing – all the things that learners in a co-operative environment need to do. What aspects of the physical climate do you think are important for learners? Which do you consciously try to improve in your work?

Self-Assessment: Physical Climate

Please see suggestions for how to use a self-assessment exercise at the start of the chapter.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

• ensure that the learning venue is comfortable with respect to temperature, lighting, ventilation, seating, noise etc			
• arrange seating in a circle or semi-circle			
• provide adequate desk-top and storage space			
• check that all necessary equipment and aids are accessible and in good order			
• ensure that venues for small group work, preparation of role plays, individual study and so on are adequate			
• ensure access to parking, canteen facilities, libraries, cloakrooms etc			
• arrange suitable residential accommodation when necessary			

My additional ideas about the physical climate:

Total:

Building A Co-operative Physical Climate

In preparing venues in which learners will learn and live, we try to create physical conditions so people feel cared for, comfortable and relaxed. It is obviously important to ensure adequate light, ventilation, warmth, quiet, privacy, cleanliness and space in any learning environment. Given the lack of resources in many educational institutions, you may need to prepare well in advance and lobby widely for even such basics as light bulbs, boards and markers. Hardly inspiring work, but without these items your most creative educational plans are almost certain to fail.

In trying to create a co-operative climate, we arrange the venue to encourage open communication and equality of consideration in the group. For example, we arrange chairs in a circle (or semi-circle if a screen or board is to be used) to encourage eye-contact and interaction; and we as facilitators sit in the same chairs or desks in the circle with learners. If you can possibly arrange for learners to have free access to a kitchen where they can cook communally and socialize, this quickly breaks down many initial barriers. *(Ewan, 1984:104-6; Hope & Timmel, 1984b:9; Pohl, 1978:52; Shor, 1980:119; Voigt, 1984:9; Werner & Bower, 1982:1.19)*

Shor makes the point that physical facilities clearly communicate how the powerful groups in society view learners. Writing about community colleges in the United States, he says:

> The cheapness, the coldness, the drabness and hardness of the surfaces combine with the bad food, functional design of exteriors, and roaring noise of the expressway, to tell you that ... you and this college are not very important in American higher education.... Everyone knows how comfortably furnished the elite schools are, so the repulsive environment of the workercollege is just one more judgement on the worthlessness of the students who go there. (Shor, 1980:79)

What intended and unintended messages does the physical environment in your learning venue communicate to learners? You may have found the content in this section obvious or even banal – we have often felt that way when reading about the physical learning environment. Nevertheless, we decided to include it – brief as it is – not only for the sake of comprehensiveness but because as learners we have often been victims of grossly inadequate physical arrangements. Now, as educators, we try to ensure that the physical environment communicates something of the respect we feel for learners and the warmth we hope will develop in the learning group. When we succeed, the tasks of building co-operative psychological, social, intellectual and administrative climates are made much simpler.

The Psychological Climate

The psychological learning climate is concerned with how learners and educators feel about and experience themselves and each other in the group. Some of these feelings will depend on the physical environment they encounter as we discussed above. Others depend on the kind of social interactions within the group, which we discuss in the next section. Here, we focus on subtle psychological issues: do members of the learning group trust and respect each other? Are they comfortable relating openly and honestly? Are they 'being themselves' rather than playing roles? Do they feel accepted and valued as individuals? If you answer positively to these kinds of questions, then the psychological climate on your course is probably supportive and co-operative. If not, you may want to consider some of the issues we raise below.

Self-Assessment: Psychological Climate

Please see suggestions for how to use a self-assessment exercise at the start of the chapter.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

- build trust in the group by:
  - disclosing my own educational, social, political and other relevant philosophies when appropriate, ensuring that my views carry no greater weight than those of others in the group
  - acknowledging my mistakes and remaining non-defensive
  - consistently 'being myself', behaving genuinely and spontaneously rather than playing the role of teacher
  - remaining self-critical, open to new ideas and responsive to feedback and suggestions from learners
  - taking responsibility for my actions and feelings and asking others in the group to do so too
  - treating all learners fairly and consistently, avoiding favouritism
  - openly acknowledging ignorance instead of trying to appear 'the expert' about all things
  - participating as an equal in group discussions and small group work whenever possible and appropriate
  - not making promises I may be unable to keep
  - showing that all human responses are respected and all topics are accepted as valid areas for democratic decision-making

- demonstrate respect and caring for learners in the group by:
  - giving frequent positive reinforcement and praise, without patronizing them
  - relating to them as adults and equals
  - using physical contact in culturally and socially acceptable forms
  - treating each person as an individual
  - emphasizing that we are all learners and educators together
  - having realistic expectations of people
  - taking their feelings and requests seriously
  - showing respect for their values and beliefs, while also challenging them to examine these things critically
  - being open to challenge about my own views and beliefs too
  - remembering the importance of listening rather than always talking
  - being punctual and well-prepared
  - being available for individual discussions and consultations
  - avoiding sarcasm, value judgements and hurtful humour
  - trying to respond to their immediate needs (for reassurance, rest, information etc)
  - taking an interest in their personal and work lives
  - building self-confidence by providing opportunities to succeed whenever possible

My additional ideas about the psychological climate:

Total:

Building A Co-operative Psychological Climate

Build trust

It is easy to encourage educators to build and maintain trust, more difficult to say how this might be done, and a bigger problem still to do it.

How do you as a facilitator build trust in your learning groups? How could you do so more effectively? We ask these questions first to encourage you to reflect on your own educational practice, and second, to stimulate you to think of ideas we may not have included below.

Perhaps the most central – and the most difficult to communicate – aspect of trust-building in our work relates to empathy for and identification with participants. Whether they are women (in a patriarchal society), blacks (in apartheid South Africa), and nurses (in a doctor-dominated health service), or white, male doctors in this same context, we try to 'stand in their shoes' and imagine what life must be like in their unique circumstances. We try to communicate our appreciation of the pressures we assume they might feel, and check our assumptions unashamedly. We want learners to know that we are 'with' them; that we want to accompany them as they embark on a journey of discovery together with us; and that we would like to be able to count on them to support us and others in the learning group during our shared journey. But at the same time, we want to challenge – and be challenged by – them: are they (and we) resigned to oppressive conditions which should be changed; or complacently accepting privilege and authority over others (in families, work-teams, or in society at large) without critically perceiving themselves (and ourselves) as oppressors? How we bring issues like this into the open is discussed in Chapter 2.

One useful technique is to schedule regular trust-building and stress-reducing sessions. For example, we may facilitate a session like the one described below on the first or second day of a course.

> ***'Fears For The Course' Sessions***
>
> Each member of the learning group, including ourselves, gets a chance to think individually and then to share whatever we choose to about what worries us about participating in the course. Participants often say they fear they will not cope academically. Voicing this and hearing that others have the same fear may be reassuring. Personal concerns, for example, 'Will I neglect my family?' and 'Will the child-care arrangements I have made be adequate?' are often raised too. We have spoken about our own insecurities as facilitators, about fears that we will not live up to others' expectations, and about personal and social concerns. Sharing problems at this level emphasizes that we are all vulnerable, have fears, and can give and get support if we will just open ourselves to this way of relating in the learning group. As Apps (1987) points out, stress is a major barrier to adult learning, and facilitators should help learners deal with and reduce the sources of stress in their lives.

Being open and honest about our mistakes also helps build trust. Appendix 5 contains extracts from some 'open letters' we wrote to participants reflecting on mistakes we had made as facilitators.

Some educators think participants will not respect them if they admit ignorance or mistakes. What do you think?

Be genuine

Rogers (1961, 1970; 1983) encourages educators to be 'genuine' and 'real' human beings in their educational relationships instead of being distant and superior, playing a role. Once educators have revealed themselves as real people, others in the group are more likely to do so too, and then open and honest relationships can develop and significant learning can occur. *(Brundage & Mackeracher, 1980:59, 84; Ferrier et al, 1988:169; Griffin, 1977:14; Hammond, 1985a:21; Knowles, 1975:10-11; Powell, 1988:118; Rogers, 1970:44)*

Reflections On Being Ourselves

We tried to behave genuinely and to avoid playing the roles of teachers. This was made easier by others in the learning group who put remarkably little pressure on us to conform to a conventional educator's role. Our explanation for this lack of learner resistance is that we had been consistent about 'being ourselves' in correspondence and during pre-course visits even before the group physically assembled. Then, from the first session of the course, these patterns were reinforced. Once people accepted that this was how we were going to 'be' on the course, many of them moved away from stereotyped behaviours of the student role, and 'were themselves' in turn. Seeing their colleagues taking the risks of being 'human', others in the group also gained confidence and let down their usual defences.

Behaving sincerely is part of being genuine. In a workshop, Sipho Nkosi used a role-play to highlight the importance of being sincere with learners. He played an educator who was open and relaxed on the surface, but showed another side as soon as the learners showed any initiative.

Role-Play Used To Highlight The Problem Of Insincerity, Designed By Sipho Nkosi

Educator: Good morning and welcome. I want to emphasize that you should all feel free here. Let's tackle this session as equals together. The topic I have to discuss today is how paper is made. Well, in the first place ... (proceeds with a complicated explanation).

Learner: Excuse me ... um, sorry ... but, well ... I was just wondering....

Educator: Yes? Please – go ahead. Don't worry, just ask your question.

Learner: Well, um ... I just wondered why we have to know all this about paper. I mean ... I don't see the relevance of it.

Educator: Hmm. Yes. Thank you for that question. I'm sure it will all be clear to you when I've finished my lecture. I must say it's very good that you are feeling free to ask your questions and so on. That is very nice. Don't think of me as a 'teacher' as such. I am more of your equal; a partner in learning! Now, where was I? (Continues lecture as before.)

After this role-play, Sipho asked workshop participants – all of us practising adult educators – whether something like this had ever happened to us, or if we had ever done it to learners. We all did some soul-searching.

Respect learners

Showing respect also helps to build trust. *(Brundage & Mackeracher, 1980:98, 114; Pine & Horne, 1969:133; Rogers, 1970:47; Werner & Bower, 1982:1.4, 1.6)*

All adult educators insist: 'Of course I respect my students'; so we must ask 'Do your students see what you are doing as respectful?' (Vella, 1979:1)

How do you demonstrate respect for learners with whom you work?

Some ways an educator can demonstrate respect for learners include being well-prepared and punctual; spending time getting to know them; asking for and responding to feedback; accepting different religious beliefs and opinions; treating them as equals; avoiding insults and sarcasm; and being non-judgemental. *(Abbatt, 1980:46-7; Ewan, 1984:46-7; Knowles, 1975:10; Ulmer, 1981:55; Voigt, 1984:10-11; Werner & Bower, 1982:1.6, 1.23)*

Did you think of other ways you could show respect for learners?

Accept learners

Finally, learners need to feel accepted and cared for. How might this be achieved?

Some ways of demonstrating acceptance and caring include showing learners what Rogers calls 'unconditional positive regard'; responding to the immediate needs and problems of learners; use of positive reinforcement; building their confidence and esteem; and use of appropriate physical contact. *(Abbatt, 1980:46-7; Brundage & Mackeracher, 1980:84; Knowles, 1975:9; Quinn, 1980:53, 176; Rogers, 1970:48, 52, 58-9; Stanton, 1988; Voigt, 1984:8-9; Werner & Bower, 1982:1.4, 1.6, 4.4)*

Using Physical Contact In Learning Groups

At the start of each residential block, after not having seen each other for a couple of months, participants would greet each other and ourselves with a warm handshake, a hug, or an arm-around-the-shoulder embrace. We had never been part of a learning group in which this occurred, and initially found the physical contact a bit strange. Soon, however, our awkwardness decreased and we really valued renewing contact with even such a limited physical gesture as a handshake.

People are usually extremely sensitive to how others react to and treat them, and we often alter our responses depending on our perceptions of their perceptions of us. If we as educators want to free up the emotional energy in a learning group so that it can be creatively channelled, we must ensure a positive psychological climate where each participant feels accepted and respected and where mutual trust develops. Closely related to the psychological climate is the social climate – that aspect concerned with the interactions between participants. We focus on this in the next section.

The Social Climate

The social climate concerns relations and interactions between participants in the learning group. The social and psychological climates are closely related: if learners feel accepted and respected as individuals, they are much more likely to break out of conventional roles, participate actively in discussions, seek help from co-learners, and so on. What issues relating to social aspects of the learning climate do you usually consider?

Self-Assessment: Social Climate

There are some suggestions for how to use a self-assessment exercise at the start of the chapter.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

• encourage learners to use first names or even nicknames in the group as quickly as possible (unless this is culturally taboo between close colleagues and friends)			
• clarify the unconventional role I will be playing and the roles that learners will be asked to play in the group			
• plan specific interventions to break the ice initially and to re-break it and keep it broken throughout the course			
• use humour and fun as educational aids			
• consciously intervene to break down age, gender, ethnic, language, religious, occupational or other barriers that may exist in the group			
• analyse the group process frequently, and help learners become aware of themselves and others as participants in discussions			
• help learners overcome discomfort with silence in the group: it's a normal, healthy response while we all think			
• resist the temptation to fill silences with the sound of my own voice			
• use new words to describe the new processes and relationships in the group rather than using conventional words with negative connotations			
• encourage learning partnerships between colleagues so that participants motivate and share insights with each other			
• arrange regular social events with the learning group			
• prevent over-dependence on the group from developing			
• use personal correspondence to support participants			
My additional ideas about the social climate:			
Total:			

Building A Co-operative Social Climate

Break barriers

There are barriers to openness and learner autonomy in most learning groups initially. In many, these same barriers remain in place, entrenched and even strengthened, by the end of the course. It may be female learners deferring to males; younger members deferring to older ones; or learners from one social class, occupation, or cultural group deferring to others. Almost always, learners as a group defer to educators.

How then can we establish relationships in which every individual is valued and encouraged to participate equally?

Use first names

We use first names in the learning group from the outset – unless there are cultural taboos against this practice. If you have not tried this (or not been successful at helping initially resistant learners to call you by your first name), you may find it a potentially powerful starting point. This is not to imply that the use of first names will, in itself, guarantee a co-operative learning climate; or that in some cultural and social settings, the use of more formal means of addressing each other would necessarily preclude it. It is a small but symbolically important step in the complex process of building and maintaining a co-operative climate.

Depending on the cultural setting in which you work, you may find more or less learner resistance to using first names – even among themselves. During our work in South Africa, one participant said: 'Calling each other by first names encouraged open relationships in our group. As we were a mixed group – doctors and nurses, blacks and whites – at first it was difficult to call each other by our first names. But the ice-breaking exercises like the Name Game helped us a lot'.

> ***The 'Name Game'***
>
> The 'Name Game' is used at the start of a workshop or course to help participants relax and learn the names of their co-learners. It also ensures that everyone participates from the outset. People are asked to think of a word starting with the same letter as their first name which describes how they are feeling at the time. Some examples might be 'Anxious Anna', 'Motivated Martin' or 'Tired Thandi'...

Some educators feel that first names are 'too familiar', or that learners will not respect them if they use first names. What do you think?

Break the ice

We use the term 'ice-breaking' to refer not to a superficial 'let's-all-introduce-ourselves' phase, but to a fundamental process of re-defining power relations and roles in a learning group. The objective is to achieve what Freire (1970b:12) calls authentic dialogue between equally worthy, equally knowing subjects. The need for 'ice-breaker' and team- and relationship-building exercises is emphasized by many authors. *(Arnold & Burke, 1983:46-8; Arnold et al, 1985b:78-83; Crone & Hunter, 1980; Farlow, 1986:5-6; Fordyce & Weil, 1971:168-70; Hammond, 1985a; Hope & Timmel, 1984a,b,c; Johnson & Johnson, 1975:11-12; Knowles, 1975:71-4; Simpson, 1985a; Stephenson, 1981:148; Vella, 1979:33-9; Werner & Bower, 1982:4.6-4.13, 14.1-14.14)*

> (Exercises to aid group process can be used):
>
> A. For introductions – ... at the beginning of the workshop to break the ice and help people get to know each other.
>
> B. For group building and participation – Throughout the workshop, there are exercises which can help strengthen participation and build a spirit of

> cooperation.
>
> C. For animation, relaxation and fun – After periods of intense concentration or when energy is sagging, an exercise can help relax and energize participants. (Arnold & Burke, 1983:46)

Rogers (1970, 1983) prefers unstructured 'encounter groups' to the more commonly used, structured psycho-social techniques recommended by most authors. We believe each can be useful, though the reasons for using them differ. Encounter groups are emotionally intense and can result in deep personal growth, but are time-consuming and have unpredictable outcomes. Structured psycho-social exercises, on the other hand, are brief, focused and yet emotionally involving. Participants generally evaluate these sessions very positively. The trust and understanding that develops provides a strong basis for a co-operative learning climate, improved group process, and new friendships.

We use humour, play and fun during initial ice-breaking and throughout the course – a little laughter goes a long way to improve the atmosphere in a group and to re-energize participants. Melamed (1987:15) goes further and says that a playful approach to learning is helpful or even essential to many adult learners. At the same time, however, care must be taken not to appear flippant or to patronize adult learners. *(Abbatt, 1980:47; Boud, 1987:236; Davies, 1987; Farlow, 1986:3; Guinee, 1966:42; Quinn, 1980:176; Shor, 1980:116-9; Werner & Bower, 1982:1.11)*

Ice often re-forms in a group, especially overnight or after a period of absence. So you might want to schedule time for re-breaking it:

Idea For An 'Ice Re-Breaker' By Janet Giddy

Following the first week of intense psycho-social activities, we started the second week of the course with a session in which each of us shared two experiences about our weekend: one nice and one not-so-nice thing that happened. It was very relaxed; lots of laughs and sympathy for problems our peers had encountered. It was very successful, I felt.

Clarify new roles

It is important to clarify the roles people will be asked to play in a learning group. If the educator intends to be non-directive, for example, this should be stated, and a rationale provided. This is not only fairer to others in the group, but also makes it easier to resist subsequent learner pressure to play the more familiar role of 'expert'. *(Brundage & Mackeracher, 1980:84; Knowles, 1975:10; Powell, 1988:118)*

Shor (1980:102) identifies numerous alternative roles for teachers in liberatory classes: convenor, facilitator, advocate, adversary, mediator, recorder, librarian and so on. We would add: learning partner, friend, and resource person. Can you think of other roles you might play? (Also see Boud [1987:235] and Stephenson [1988:215-6] for ideas about alternative roles.) Needless to say, each new role demands that we develop appropriate skills and unlearn old, controlling behaviours. We also clarify that we expect participants to be resources for themselves and their peers, directors of their own learning, and self- and peer-evaluators.

Develop a new vocabulary

Another way to break down conventional barriers and establish a more co-operative learning climate is to use new vocabulary to think and communicate about people and activities in the educational situation. For example, you could stop calling yourself a 'teacher', and the course participants 'pupils' or 'students', because these words carry connotations of authority and subservience, power and powerlessness. *(Parlett & Dearden, 1977:19)*

> Certainly, we have discovered ... that great strides can be made if the words 'teach' and 'teaching' are simply subtracted from the operational lexicon.... Of such small language shifts, revolutions can be made. (Postman & Weingartner, 1969:47)

We found such 'language shifts' to be an important part of the transformation process from TDL to SDL for both learners and co-ordinators. It's amazing how our behaviour can change when we no longer think about ourselves as playing conventional roles, or use conventional terms to refer to ourselves. (See Chapter 9 for fuller discussion of role re-conceptualization).

New Words For New Relationships

We referred to 'participants', not students; 'learning venues', not classrooms; and the 'learning group', not the class. In one group, participants invented new words to describe new relationships and processes, such as 'co-learners' instead of peers or fellow students. In another, the phrase 'learning consultant' replaced supervisor or tutor. In one workshop, we even coined the phrase 'tearning' to refer to the teaching-learning process. Pronounced like 'turning', the neologism prompted jokes about the need to 'tearn' away from didactic approaches and so on. But it also encouraged us all to consider the power of language and the need to examine our use of it more critically.

Encourage learning partnerships

Learning partnerships can strengthen social and academic relationships in a learning group, as we discuss in Chapter 6.

Did you think of other ways to break down the barriers that often exist in a learning group?

Analyse group process

Awareness of group process is crucial to ensure that all participants can and do actively participate in discussions and learning sessions. *(Hope & Timmel, 1984b:51-4; Johnson & Johnson, 1975:12-13; Werner & Bower, 1982:4.9-4.10)*

Helping Learners To Focus On Group Process

One technique we have used is to ask participants to work through a brief handout and complete a self-assessment form about group process (see Appendix 1). Thereafter, we facilitated a discussion about how we could all help change the unsatisfactory aspects of our group process. We also gave regular feedback to participants during individual consultations and in personal letters (see last point in this section) about how we perceived their participation. Still later in the course, we put up a summary of the results of group process analyses made during several sessions (see extract immediately below) so that each person could see how many times s/he and everyone else in the group had participated. For several people, seeing this 'hard data' about what was happening in the group had a major impact on their future participation in the group: more dominant members held back to give others a chance and people who had not participated much became more active.

Do you think you could help learners to focus on group process without causing them to become self-conscious – one of the potential problems we discussed earlier in this chapter?

Keeping Track Of Group Process

We kept a simple record of group process by writing the name of each person who spoke during a 15- or 20-minute period of a group discussion. This was done at random times on different days during each residential block. The general overview this provided was sufficient for our purposes, and we could participate in discussions while keeping accurate records. Following this, a participant's individual contribution to the discussions could be converted to a percentage of the total contributions. For example, if a total of 100 contributions was made by all 12 participants in the various discussions during one block, and participant #1 was responsible for 25 of these while #2 initiated only five of them, then their percentage scores for participation during that block would be 25 per cent and 5 per cent respectively. Thus the higher the percentage score, the more active the individual, and vice versa. The total percentage score for each block was 100 per cent, and the mean was 100/12 = 8 per cent.

Ideally, one would like almost equal participation. Allowing for different personalities, past experiences and interests, however, we set an arbitrary 'acceptable range' of 25 per cent above or below the mean. Using this standard, in the first block, there were seven 'low talkers' (scores of less than 6 per cent) whose mean was only 3 per cent; five 'high talkers' (scores of more than 10 per cent) whose mean was 16 per cent; and nobody in the 'acceptable range'. By the final block that year, on the other hand, there were only two 'low talkers', whose mean was 4 per cent; two 'high talkers' with a mean of only 12 per cent; and eight in the acceptable range. These changes were encouraging, and we believe they can be attributed to first, trying to build a climate which was conducive to equal participation, and second, to making the issue of group process explicit in the ways described above.

Schedule social activities

In our experience, alternative educational relationships are easier to establish if at least some early interactions occur outside a formal learning situation, where associations of inhibition, subservience and passivity may be very strong. Social events allow people to relax, be themselves and start relating on a personal level. We usually start a workshop or course with an event such as a communal meal or party the evening before. Thereafter, we schedule other social events (picnics, hikes, trips to nature reserves, movies etc) after the group has agreed on the nature and timing of them.

Dancing As A Social Activity

One of the first social events – a party – we scheduled during the orientation period took place in the same venue that was used for academic work during the day. The transformation of the learning venue into a dance-hall perhaps served as a symbolic statement about the need to integrate our intellectual selves with ourselves as social beings. Initial embarrassment was evident in some participants who were either shy and/or culturally unaccustomed to group dancing and women dancing together. After a few similar events, however, dancing together became a regular social event; indeed, it became part of the 'culture' of the course. The more outgoing members of the group who had been watching their reticent co-learners rejoiced every time a new 'dancer' joined in. Eventually, a combination of playful group pressure and loss of inhibition transformed even the most committed observers into dancers. Some of our finest memories – and photographs – of this course are of these regular dances.

In some groups, learners may want to form recreational interest groups such as a choir, sports team, or yoga group. At the same time as you encourage closeness and warmth among members of a group, you'll want to avoid creating over-dependence on the group: participants have commitments and relationships that extend far beyond the course. These need and deserve nurturing throughout its duration. Brookfield (1987:74) goes further and suggests that educators should pay attention to the potentials for 'significant personal learning' which intimate (eg marital, parent-child) relationships provide. Rather than viewing time spent with family and friends as distractions from serious learning, it could be seen as a vital stimulus and resource for learning.

Personal correspondence

We sometimes underestimate the insecurity and stress many adults experience in formal learning situations. If we are to help them move ahead with confidence, many will need personal encouragement and support. Official correspondence with and personal feedback to learners are crucial strategies to support self-management of learning, as we discuss in Chapter 6. A strategy we have found particularly helpful, however, is personal letters exchanged between participants and ourselves, particularly (but not exclusively) in distance-learning situations. We discuss personal correspondence in more detail in Chapter 7. We wrote some letters to individual participants (see Appendix 2 for examples), and others were 'open letters' addressed to the learning group as a whole (Appendix 5). Likewise, the responses we received were sometimes personal, and other times intended for the group to share. In some cases, participants who were initially too shy to elaborate on their personal concerns in a group session did so in a letter afterwards.

> **Extract From A Personal Letter Written By Vivienne Tjapepua**
>
> Dear Merryl and Rob,
>
> Thank you for the open letters you wrote to us as a group. They were very stimulating. About the 'Fears for the course' session, the immediate problem I had was 'missing my family'. You see, this is the first time I have been away from home for more than three days in succession ... (letter continues with details about home and family circumstances).

This kind of personal correspondence not only 'keeps the ice broken' between participants and ourselves, but it opens the possibility of more meaningful, personal relationships developing between correspondents. If you value these relationships like we do, you too may find personal letters a useful aid.

Which of these strategies to build a co-operative social climate could you adapt or apply in your work? Did you think of other ideas to add? In building a co-operative social climate, we try to break barriers and provide optimal conditions for everyone to participate to their full potential. In such conditions, learning takes on new meaning, and many participants – ourselves included – experience surprising personal and intellectual growth. Speaking of which, we discuss the intellectual learning climate next.

The Intellectual Climate

We find the 'intellectual climate' a useful category to consider separately, although it is closely related to the psychological and social climates: if learners feel psychologically secure and socially at ease in a learning group, they are more likely to accept intellectual challenges, extend themselves as learners, and share ideas and insights with co-learners. What strategies do you use to build a co-operative 'intellectual climate'? Can you think of others you might use?

Self-Assessment: Intellectual Climate

Please see suggestions for how to use a self-assessment exercise at the start of the chapter.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

- think of myself as a non-dependent, self-directing person and treat others in the same way ☐ ☐ ☐

- remind myself that only the learner can learn, and focus on facilitating learning rather than on 'teaching' ☐ ☐ ☐
- communicate my own enthusiasm for learning ☐ ☐ ☐
- make the links between the various steps in SDL clear to learners ☐ ☐ ☐
- show respect for the intellectual resources of individual learners by creating opportunities for them to share ideas, help each other and work together ☐ ☐ ☐
- consciously try to make complex material understandable without losing the essence of the concepts (demystify but don't oversimplify) ☐ ☐ ☐
- encourage learners to question and challenge – including my statements and suggestions ☐ ☐ ☐
- stimulate learners to critically analyse their social, economic, political, work, and home situations ☐ ☐ ☐
- provide structured opportunities to reflect on experiences and make personal meaning ☐ ☐ ☐
- avoid 'censoring' the ideas, expressions and emotions of participants ☐ ☐ ☐
- encourage active participation by all ☐ ☐ ☐

My additional ideas about the intellectual climate: ☐ ☐ ☐

Total: ☐ ☐ ☐

Building A Co-operative Intellectual Climate

Explain the links between steps in SDL

One way of building a co-operative intellectual climate is not to expect learners to passively 'do as they are told' in becoming self-directed learners. Rather, we should help participants understand why each step in the SDL process is necessary and why some must precede others (eg why it is necessary to build a co-operative learning climate initially; how and why the situation analyses provide the basis for generating the competency profile; why the competency profile then forms the basis for self-assessment instruments; and why self-assessment must precede the drafting of learning contracts and so on). We discuss how we have done this with a learning group in Chapter 3.

Respect learners' intellectual abilities

'Making friends' with learners is not sufficient to build a co-operative climate. We also need to stimulate critical thought and analysis and help learners realize that they can create knowledge based on their past experiences and insights. For learners who have never had to think for themselves, this is a potentially threatening process, and the first step is to help them recognize their own intellectual capabilities. The facilitator should show respect for their ability to analyse, think creatively, argue and so on. From the start of a course or workshop, we plan sessions specifically to encourage active participation. If you show that you expect a high level of participation, and that you respect learners as 'creative subjects' (Freire, 1970b:12) in an educational partnership with you and the others in the learning group, they will realize that their contributions are appreciated and will tend to participate more actively. *(Freire, 1970a:57-74; Hope & Timmel, 1984a:55-61; 1984c:3-66; Rogers, 1983:205-6; Werner & Bower, 1982:1.6, 1.16)*

We try to create an atmosphere in which people will trust themselves and others intellectually as well as psychologically. Only then do they challenge, question, re-think, and experience what Weiser (1987) calls growth of consciousness. Also, once learners trust themselves, they are more likely to share their ideas as resources for learning with others, and to respect the resources of their peers. We do not deny the value of conventional resources like educators, books and so on; however, the perception of these as the only valid sources of knowledge has to be challenged. The atmosphere in a learning group changes almost palpably when it is accepted that we can all create knowledge ourselves.

Suggestions and comments made by learners should be encouraged and appreciated, without patronizing them. Some educators, trying to show 'respect' for learners may pretend that they value a contribution when they do not. People will soon lose trust if this happens. If we are not clear about a point or if we disagree with a learner, we say so.

Have you, like us, been challenged by the need to help learners understand complex and abstract new concepts? The tendency is often to oversimplify rather than to clarify and demystify concepts. We believe that oversimplifying to 'protect' learners from complexity or ambiguity is robbing them of a chance to grow intellectually. Our challenge as educators is to demystify issues while avoiding such robbery. As Freire (1970b:25) says, we must try to explain things 'simply, though not simplistically'. (This issue is further discussed in Chapter 2.)

Encourage situation analysis

The ability to critically analyse one's situation is fundamental in SDL as we discuss in Chapter 2. We mention it here because the intellectual environment must be conducive to creative and critical analysis. We try to create opportunities (small group discussions, scheduled time for personal reflection and so on) for learners to 'make personal meaning' from information and experiences (see Chapter 7). When participants analyse and discuss their situations, they learn about each other's political and social philosophies. In a non-judgemental atmosphere, they feel freer to think critically about their own views and those of others; not feeling defensive, they may more openly consider new ideas and gain new insights.

Avoid 'censorship'

Educators in a co-operative environment avoid censoring learners: no limits are set on what is acceptable content to discuss in the group or in individual consultations. We should not fear controversy. On the contrary, we should challenge participants to consider previously taken-for-granted issues and conventionally 'out-of-bounds' topics. For example, in our work with South African health workers in the 1980s, we specifically raised the issues of racism, sexism, and apartheid. Brookfield (1987:67) suggests that we should purposely encourage learners to explore conventionally taboo topics such as tensions in their intimate relationships. He contends that many of our most significant learnings occur within these relationships and that they should therefore be used as resources for learning.

We also try not to censor learners' emotions. If they are exploring potentially challenging, threatening or painful issues, then reactions of anger, upset, confusion, frustration and excitement can all be expected. We should thus be prepared to cope with the full range of emotional responses from joyous laughter to bitter tears, none of which are common in conventional classrooms:

> Displays of emotion do not betoken pedagogic failure. Rather, they can frequently be welcomed as doses of reality in the otherwise artificially bloodless arena of the classroom. (Brookfield, 1990:191-2)

Did you think of other strategies to help build a co-operative intellectual climate? So far, we have discussed the importance of a consistent learning climate philosophy, and seen how the physical conditions under which learning occurs can either help or hinder the building of a co-operative climate. Psychological and social factors will have a major impact on the intellectual growth learners experience. The final aspect of the learning climate we want to mention is the administrative climate. It is crucial that the administration of a course should reflect the same qualities of co-operation and mutual respect that we strive to achieve in the other aspects of the learning climate.

The Administrative Climate

How a course is handled administratively has a considerable effect on the learning climate. We need to ensure that participants can share in administrative decision-making, so flexibility and openness to new ideas are essential in SDL course administration. Of course, we may face severe constraints in this regard. Institutional rules, criticism from conservative colleagues, and even learner resistance may deter us. But if we fail to *administer the course co-operatively, much of our hard work in all the other aspects of the learning climate will be negated. Learners will soon realize that we alone are controlling aspects of the course, and thus aspects of their lives. Any talk of 'educational power-sharing' will ring hollow after that. What strategies would contribute towards building a co-operative learning climate as far as your course administration is concerned?*

Self-Assessment: Administrative Climate

Please see suggestions for how to use a self-assessment exercise at the start of the chapter.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

- keep the design of the course flexible so that new ideas (from participants and from my own experiences) can be easily incorporated
- open my proposals for discussion and democratic decision-making by participants
- negotiate with participants about administrative decisions whenever feasible
- negotiate with learners about curriculum decisions either jointly if the whole group is contracting together or individually for self-directed learning programmes
- facilitate individual, small group and large group work to provide a balance, to give opportunities for new relationships to be started, and to meet individual, small group and communal learning needs
- ensure that course documentation reflects the 'spirit' of the learning climate I hope to build with the group
- set up administrative systems (eg for maintaining contact with distance learners, continuing evaluation, validating achievements etc) which are consistent with the SDL philosophy
- if feasible, meet participants before the course starts to answer their questions, allay anxieties and start the process of relationship-building

My additional ideas about the administrative climate:

Total:

Building A Co-operative Administrative Climate

Ensure flexibility

In preparing ourselves to co-ordinate SDL, we asked for feedback on our initial plans from a variety of educators nationally and internationally. Many of them emphasized that a flexible administrative approach to self-directed learning is essential. (*Boud, 1985a; Brundage, 1985; Cox, 1985; Ewan, 1985; Flung, 1985; Garde, 1985; Gayfer, 1985; Truscott, 1985; Wagstaff, 1985*)

> **Being Flexible**
>
> A draft timetable (entitled 'Suggested timetable') for the orientation workshop was circulated on the first evening of the course. We explained that it should be viewed as a 'rough guide only' because of the unpredictable nature of climate-building workshops. Because the timetable did change as the workshop progressed, an 'actual timetable' was circulated after the event for participants' records. Having a suggested timetable which is stated to be flexible, and is in fact so, is a major change from timetables in TDL courses. It showed participants that their suggestions and needs would be seriously considered as the course progressed. Another aspect of flexibility related to the evaluation plan. The initial proposals about how participants would be evaluated during the course were considerably revised to accommodate ideas suggested by participants (see Chapter 8).

There is, of course, a tension here. If we are serious about including learners and sharing educational power, should we not refrain from drafting even a 'suggested timetable' or making 'initial evaluation proposals'? In some cases this may be best, but if every plan and proposal had to be made by the learning group it would become unduly time-consuming. We find that a good compromise is often for us to make tentative plans which are then opened for discussion and group decision-making. Sometimes, our plans only concern methods to help the group decide what they would like to plan! Co-ordinators of SDL cannot avoid planning. It is, however, necessary to disclose these plans and to get feedback from the group before agreeing about how to proceed. We allocate formal time to discuss proposals with participants. The discussions relate to both major curriculum issues as well as minor administrative arrangements as we discuss below.

Include learners in decision-making

Learners feel respected when they share in decision-making about their course. Many participants will never have experienced the sense of power and control that democratic participation can bring. We believe this is especially important for participants who have been previously oppressed politically, socially, occupationally, or in other ways. The most fundamental decisions concern what, how, where and when the learner will learn, and how learning will be evaluated. The rest of this book deals in detail with how control over these educational decisions can be shared with participants. However, in addition to sharing control with participants about academic matters, we also do so for simple administrative issues like what time group sessions should begin and end, and when tea and lunch breaks should be scheduled. Especially during the first days of a SDL course when learners still feel threatened and confused about academic requirements, this can help them take immediate control over parts of their lives which are traditionally externally controlled. However, care should be taken not to 'overdo' this (see Heron, 1988:78-9).

Reflections On Democratic Decision-Making

Many participants found sessions in which they were asked to decide on something almost exhilarating. It was not necessarily that a major decision had been reached, or even that they had swung the vote to what they personally wanted. It was simply the fact that they had been consulted. However, a few participants who were more accustomed to exercising power and taking control got frustrated and felt that time was being wasted. (As participants got more experience of making democratic decisions in the group, the discussions were much shorter and more efficient than at first: like any new skill, this one needed practice.) We compromised by routinizing some decisions early on, to avoid endless discussions about such issues as what time to have tea today, or what time to start learning sessions tomorrow and so on. However, this is not to imply that these minor administrative decisions should be arbitrarily made by the co-ordinator. We believe that everyone in the group has a right to influence such matters. But one discussion and decision could hold for the whole course unless someone felt strongly enough to raise it as an issue for discussion again later.

Most of our work has been with relatively small learning groups (between ten and 20 participants). Do you think democratic decision-making could be used in larger groups? If so, how?

Schedule individual, small group, and large group tasks

In some learning sessions, individual work is required; but in others, people can work in small or large groups. For group tasks, we initially place people with others whom they do not know well to create opportunities for new relationships to develop. Constant forming and re-forming of working groups helps to break down barriers and keep them broken, and it provides practice in working democratically and co-operatively in a group. Learners must experience both the exhilaration and the frustration that group work and collective action brings if they are to have realistic expectations of these modes in other situations.

Communication and correspondence

Prospective participants often receive course brochures and other documentation about a course. You can communicate in these documents about the kind of learning climate you hope to develop. For example, you might explain the philosophy of the course, and say why your approach to education is unconventional. Also, you could use an informal style and tone in this correspondence, rather than the usual formal manner of address. We used an unusual form of course correspondence in one course:

Keeping Others Informed About The Course

The colleagues and employers of part-time participants were kept regularly informed about progress on the course in a series of letters, copies of which were

sent to participants. Our letters communicated something of the enthusiasm and respect we felt for participants and their progress. Several of the participants' colleagues wrote back thanking us for keeping them informed, and expressing interest in the work being done by us and the course participants. Asked for feedback about the value of this strategy, most participants said it was worthwhile and should be continued in future. We recommend it as a quick, easy and inexpensive way of maintaining relationships with people who are important to participants, and who in some cases have the power to approve study leave for future course applicants.

Might a similar strategy be appropriate in your work?

Visit distance-learners

The self-directed course we co-ordinated was a part-time distance-learning course, drawing participants from all over the country. We found that visiting participants before the course began and again during the course was very helpful. First, we got a sense of their working environments. Given the part-time course design, conditions at their home-bases would fundamentally affect their learning. Second, we met their colleagues, employers, and in some cases families – people who we hoped would support participants during the periods between residential blocks. Third, the visits showed that we respected them enough to travel considerable distances to discuss with them the course and problems they may experience as participants. Finally, because most participants had at least met both of us co-ordinators beforehand, it made the initial task of ice-breaking during the orientation period somewhat easier. While the advantages of these visits were considerable, they were time-consuming and expensive. However, they helped establish the SDL innovation as a course to be taken seriously by participants, their colleagues and their employers. Also, they enabled us to relate to the issues and individuals that participants subsequently discussed with us. Feedback about the value of these visits from participants was unanimous: they experienced them as 'highly motivating' and 'very important'.

Did you think of other strategies to build a co-operative administrative climate? This discussion concludes our consideration of the various aspects of a co-operative learning climate. We include a periodic review and then some practical exercises you may want to complete to consolidate and apply your learning.

Periodic Review

1. Did you find our analogy of a pyramid useful to conceptualize the various elements of a learning climate? Can you think of a more appropriate one?
2. Having considered the elements of a learning climate we have identified (psychological, intellectual and so on), can you think of any others?

3. How would you explain the concept of a 'learning climate philosophy' to a colleague?
4. What aspects of the learning climate need most attention in your own work? Which strategies would you use to build a more co-operative climate and why?

Practical Exercises

Some of these exercises may be useful if you want to build a more co-operative learning climate in your work. Alternatively, you could design and complete exercises more relevant to your particular situation.

1. Write down the characteristics of a learning climate you would call co-operative. Then, ask yourself which of these characteristics learners doing your course actually experience. If there is a gap, how could you bring your theory and your practice closer together?
2. How could you prevent or overcome learner resistance to a co-operative learning climate in your own work?
3. Write a statement about your learning climate philosophy which could be included in a course brochure or made public on a noticeboard. (Have you considered phrasing specific objectives about the learning climate?) Ask a colleague for feedback on your first draft, and re-draft if necessary.
4. Design an instrument for learners to evaluate the learning climate.
5. Read some of the resources about climate-building we referred to in the section about the social climate (Hope & Timmel's work has been of greatest use to us). Then plan some trust-building and ice-breaking sessions for use with a new learning group. Try the exercises with friends or colleagues to get some experience at facilitating psycho-social sessions.
6. Which exercises would be suitable for 're-breaking the ice' later on in the course?
7. Now, decide which trust- and relationship-building exercises you could use with an existing learning group.
8. Analyse the physical facilities your learners experience. For example, if they are residential students, do they have privacy and enough cupboard and desk space in their bedrooms? Is the dining area clean, attractive and conducive to socializing? In what state are the bathrooms and toilets? (Yes, these things count too!) Can learners get easy access to books and other resources? What other issues should be considered in your setting? What can you do to improve facilities if necessary? What could learners themselves do?
9. In the social climate section we mentioned the need to clarify new roles. Write down the roles you would like to fill (eg co-operative climate-builder, learner, friend, facilitator, librarian, counsellor), and also those that you think are appropriate for learners. Then, prepare a statement for learners to explain why you want to try out new roles in the learning group.

10. Practise analysing group process in meetings and learning sessions you attend. If participants agree, give tactful but honest feedback to the group about your findings. With your own learning group(s), analyse group process over several months to evaluate your skills as a facilitator: are learners participating more equally now than they used to?
11. We have suggested developing and using a new vocabulary. Make a list of the words you usually use to refer to people, places and events in the educational situation. Then, think of alternative words for each of these: words which do not have negative connotations and which draw attention to your desire to change conventional power relations in your work.
12. Try involving a learning group in social activities like hikes, parties, communal meals, picnics etc. (Of course, learners will have many ideas that you might not have considered.) Evaluate these activities regularly to assess whether it is worth the time and effort continuing with them.
13. Write some personal letters to a learning group or individual learner you trust. See how you feel about this strategy, and then decide whether to deliver the letters or not.
14. What topics are conventionally thought to be 'out of bounds' in your field of work? Think about the effects of not raising these issues with your learners, and decide whether you should break with tradition or not. If so, how will you introduce these topics, knowing that learners may initially feel uncomfortable discussing them? (Could a role-play or story perhaps be used as a discussion-starter? Or a photograph or picture? Or could participants be asked to read a newspaper report or article which raises the issue? What other ideas have you thought of or tried in the past?)
15. Design or re-design a course brochure which will communicate respect, lack of formality and equality.
16. In the administrative section we discussed the need to involve learners in decision-making about issues which affect them. Make a list of the administrative decisions you normally make as a co-ordinator (eg essay topics, due dates and mark allocations for assignments; times for tea- and lunch-breaks; whether people may or may not smoke in the learning venue). Could these issues be decided upon democratically? Why or why not? If so, plan a session in which this can be done, scheduling enough time for learners to get used to the idea of participating first. Your job as facilitator will be to ensure that everyone's voice is heard (if only by a show of hands!), and to prevent the confident and articulate members from 'steam-rolling' others into a decision before they are ready.

Conclusion

Educators are often perceived by learners to be part of a wider network of authority figures who, at best, exercise some control over aspects of learners' lives, and at worst, actively oppress them. Educators who identify with learners and with the causes for which learners are working must therefore make clear the difference between themselves and their authoritarian colleagues. We have found that our immediate attempts to build a co-operative learning climate in a learning group have a major positive effect. Learners realize that we are 'with' them and open to them; they tend to let down their own defences much sooner and to open themselves to new ideas, new experiences, new relationships, new roles, new learnings; they come to trust themselves, their peers, and us as 'sounding boards' and resources for learning; they gain experience of a different way of 'being' in a group which they can then apply in other appropriate situations. Many feel so liberated by their participation in a co-operative group that they start thinking of themselves and their work in a different light: they develop new confidence, or they feel empowered to challenge injustices which they had previously ignored, accepted, or felt overwhelmed by.

Given that we challenge learners to examine and re-examine some of their most fundamental beliefs and assumptions in the phases of situation analysis (see Chapter 2) and reflection (Chapter 7), we find that the phase of building a co-operative learning climate (and subsequent interventions to maintain such a climate) is a crucial first step in the critical SDL process. The learning climate really is a determining foundation for all that follows.

We recommend that you return to the self-assessment exercises in this chapter and re-assess yourself (using the second column provided) now that you have considered these issues in more detail. You may decide that you need to read further about some aspects. If so, the resources referred to throughout and listed at the back of the book may be of use. You could then use the third column in the self-assessment exercises to assess yourself again at some future time. Alternatively, you may want to move right on to the next chapter.

Once a co-operative learning climate has been built, participants should be sufficiently open to new ideas and relaxed in the learning group to begin their discoveries in the new territory of SDL as such. Next, learners need to critically analyse their situations so that they can consider their work in its larger context. We discuss this second step in the critical SDL process next.

Chapter 2

Analysing The Situation

The facilitation of learning ... [is] a highly complex psychosocial drama in which the personalities of the individuals involved, the contextual setting for the educational transaction, and the prevailing political climate crucially affect the nature and form of learning. (Brookfield, 1986:vii)

Chapter Preview

How often do we function with little or no critical thought about the social, economic and political context within which we work and the effects of our actions (or inactions) on that context? Or try to implement change in an institution without first having analysed where the power lies and whose support we need? As educators, we all need to analyse the situations within which we work to ensure that our work is relevant and meets the needs it is intended to meet.

Critically analysing our own situations is only our first challenge; as co-ordinators of self-directed learning (SDL) we need to encourage learners to analyse their situations in turn, so that they can generate a relevant competency profile (Chapter 3) to keep their learning focused. Helping learners with these tasks is much easier if you have first built a co-operative learning climate (Chapter 1).

The major questions we address in this chapter are:

- What are the reasons for and potential problems of analysing the situation and encouraging learners to do so too?
- What aspects of the situation should self-directed learners and course co-ordinators analyse?
- What strategies can educators and learners use to develop skills in situation analysis? (Some of the strategies to encourage reflection discussed in Chapter 7 may also be of value here.)

Self-Assessment

This chapter contains sections about several aspects of the situation which should be analysed. Detailed self-assessment exercises about each aspect are included at the start of each section. This broadly-phrased exercise provides an overview of the whole chapter so you can decide which sections to focus on. Please use a rating scale of 1-5 where 1 means that you feel very unsure of your abilities, and 5 means that you feel competent. If you use the first column now, before reading further, you could return to this self-assessment *when you have finished working through the relevant sections of this chapter. In that way, you can 'measure' your learning. The third column could then be used at some future date if you decide to further your inquiry, perhaps using some of the resources we suggest throughout this chapter.*

As a SDL course co-ordinator, I do/would/can:

• explain what I mean by situation analysis as this relates to my educational work			
• discuss the rationale for and potential problems of both educators and learners analysing their situations			
• explain what is meant by:			
- role analysis			
- sector analysis			
- socio-economic-political analysis			
- curriculum analysis			
• list strategies that educators and learners can use to improve their situation analyses in each of these areas			
My additional ideas about situation analysis:			
Total:			

Each of these issues is dealt with in the sections which follow. You may want to skip ahead to aspects on which you have rated yourself low.

Overview Of The Concept: Situation Analysis

What Is A Situation Analysis?

> Adult education has many functions to perform, and particular social, cultural, economic and political circumstances compel concentrated attention to one function or another. (Stubblefield, 1981:21)

For our purposes, situation analysis involves critical questioning of, reflection on, and consciousness-raising about the normally taken-for-granted aspects of the situation within which learners and educators function. Situation analysis can be applied at many different levels in education, from macro-level, global analysis to micro-level analysis of individual learning needs. The purpose remains the same: to become conscientized, able to locate ourselves and our work in a broader context, so that our actions and initiatives as educators and learners are most relevant and effective under the existing historical and cultural circumstances. In other words, we see the ultimate goal of this phase (and indeed, of all other phases) of the critical SDL process being informed social action to transform society, to humanize it, to improve it in at least some small way. As Mezirow says:

> ... reflective discourse and its resulting insight alone do not make for transformative learning. Acting upon these emancipatory insights, a praxis, is also necessary. (Mezirow, 1990c:354-5)

Educators who value the process of situation analysis need to:

1. think critically and do research about aspects of their situations they have tended to take for granted;
2. motivate learners about the need for situation analysis; and
3. help themselves and learners to analyse situations more critically by using appropriate strategies to encourage the process.

If any of these steps are neglected, critical situation analysis will probably not occur in a learning group, and relevant, effective SDL and appropriate social action will probably not result.

Why Should Educators Analyse Their Situations?

Before reading our ideas, why do you think you should analyse the situation within which you work?

Situation analysis promotes critical awareness and social action

> If we have faith in men, we cannot be content with saying that they are human persons while doing nothing concrete so that they may exist as such. (Freire, 1970b:52)

If educators are to oppose social injustice and oppression, they first need to be critically aware of these conditions. The process of situation analysis is an excellent way to deepen awareness. Once people see themselves functioning in a broader context – even when it is oppressive – they often feel less powerless. They may become more confident and better able to take initiative. They no longer comply so passively; rather they start to challenge, to make demands, and even to take action. As Brookfield (1990:179) and Werner & Bower (1982:Back-1) warn, becoming critically aware and acting more progressively can have serious consequences in oppressive societies. For example, people may be victimized by conservative peers, fired from jobs, or even risk physical harm or death for opposing the status quo. We need to make rational decisions about risks and benefits before we take action, and help learners to do so too.

But don't assume that because you are critically aware of your context, your actions will necessarily be emancipatory. Many educators and other activists have a sound political-economic analysis, but their actual practice – as citizens and/or as educators – remains oppressive. Throughout this book, we warn against this gap between theory and practice. We have to become critically aware of our own educational practice as well.

Situation analysis clarifies the needs a course should address

Once you have analysed your situation you can make clear decisions about the kind of educational work you want to do. Some of the different needs you might consider include national and community needs, and the specific needs of the learners on the course. Situation analysis forces us to address the issue of what contribution we hope to make to society, what role – if any – we want to play as agents of social change.

It facilitates relevant educational planning

Having identified the needs your course should address, you can make relevant educational plans. What will be the guiding philosophy of the course? Should it be part or full time? Should it be based in a rural or an urban area? Should it include a distance-learning component? Do you need to raise money for bursaries? What resources will be needed? Is adequate student accommodation available?

What other questions should you ask to ensure that the decisions you make are as rational and relevant as possible?

It enables educators to anticipate and avoid problems

A detailed situation analysis before your course begins will help you anticipate obstacles and minimize problems. Thereafter, situation analysis should continue on a day-to-day basis during the course. We can never anticipate everything in advance, and besides, a learning group is not something predictable: the needs in the group will be changing constantly, so our responses must be flexible.

It prevents development of unrealistic expectations

Some new educators, full of enthusiasm but lacking critical awareness, enter a situation with unrealistic expectations about what can be achieved. Later, when harsh realities have disappointed them, they become frustrated and bitter, and may end up defensively under-estimating what they can in fact achieve. This process of disillusionment can be prevented if educators first analyse their situations. What are the barriers I face? Whose vested interests am I opposing, and how are these people likely to react to me? How can I draw on the support of powerful people who can help me? Which changes can I introduce immediately, and which must I delay until I have built up greater credibility (see Chapter 9)?

These are the major reasons we can think of for encouraging educators to analyse their situations. Did you think of others? Next, we mention potential problems to avoid in analysing your situation.

Potential Problems For Educators To Avoid

What problems may arise when educators analyse their situations? You may want to try generating your own ideas before reading ours.

Situation analysis must not become indoctrination

> To promote actively critical reflection at any opportunity can be to take an important learning experience of the facilitator and to project it on to the learner. (Boud, 1987:236)

If the learning climate (see Chapter 1) is not open, honest and accepting of diverse opinions, some learners may lack the confidence to make their own analyses and draw independent conclusions. Instead, they may uncritically adopt the views of their peers or educators. Can you think of ways to ensure that everyone gets a chance to develop their own ideas? While preventing peer pressure from stifling an individual's thoughts, we should not be afraid to expose learners to the views of their peers, or to our own views. After all, it is through exposure to new ideas that we all learn. If there is a non-judgemental atmosphere in the group, and if people do not feel they have to defend their opinions, they may feel comfortable considering new ideas about issues they had not critically analysed before.

> This does not mean that the facilitator must try to convert or brainwash learners into accepting some new ideology.... [T]here is an enormous difference between facilitation and attempts at political or religious conversion in that in the latter activities the political or religious ideologues have predetermined the learning outcomes of the activity. (Brookfield, 1986:17, 23)

As Habermas (1973:38-9), Heaney & Horton (1990:88) and Mezirow (1990c:362) point out, no one can pre-judge the specific types of action a person 'should' engage in as a result of new learning: it is an individual choice and depends on one's interpretation of the circumstances. Nothing can 'obligate one to militancy' (Habermas, 1973:32).

The analysis may be uncritical or superficial

Educators may base their analyses on false assumptions, or think only within the confines of the dominant ideology. Alternatively, they may automatically reject everything from the dominant elite, and uncritically accept everything proposed by an alternative ideological grouping. Neither of these approaches encourages truly critical analysis. Superficial analyses are also common. For example, educators may analyse the composition of a university learning group, noting that most learners are men, and concluding that higher education is more accessible to men than women because of sexism in society. Many educators cite racism in a similar way. But how many of the learners – regardless of their gender and race – have working-class origins? In other words, how is the political economy of the society affecting access to higher education? Another problem in consciousness-raising groups is that discussion stops at the level of individual problems rather than moving from personal experience to a larger analysis (see Hart, 1990:54).

All analysis, no action

> Learning is not a desirable outcome or a goal; it is the activity of making an interpretation that subsequently guides decision and action. (Mezirow, 1990c:375)

Educators who enjoy philosophizing and intellectual debate may spend all their time analysing and re-analysing their situations, leaving no time for action to change conditions. We have worked with 'compulsive analysers', and been frustrated by their inability to do their share of the practical work. At the same time, we were grateful that they at least made the rest of us stop to consider the implications of what we are always so busy 'doing'.

Which do you think is worse: a person who is 'all analysis, no action', or one who is 'all action, no analysis'? Which of these extreme types are you most like yourself? How can you try to develop a balance between analysis and action in your work?

Some educators, knowing that they 'should' analyse their situations, do so in an uninterested, routinized way. Then they proceed with their work, paying no attention to the issues that emerged from their analysis. They use situation analysis as a 'technique', as an end in itself. This is a perversion of the concept.

> **A Wasted Situation Analysis**
>
> One educator asked the learning group to complete a detailed diagnostic self-assessment exercise as a way of analysing the situation with regard to their individual learning needs (see Chapter 4). The learners invested a considerable amount of time completing the exercise, exposing their weaknesses on the assumption that they would be helped to improve in specific areas. The educator took the forms home to look at, then promptly ignored them and delivered a series of pre-planned lectures. The opportunity to structure appropriate and relevant learning activities based on the actual learning needs in the group was thus completely lost. Worse, the learners were left feeling abused and were negative about diagnostic self-assessment.

It may be depressing

If you have not been in the habit of analysing your situation, you may at first find it depressing. You may feel overwhelmed by problems; impotent to deal with them. However, as we have said, critical awareness is a prerequisite for progressive action, and once you are actively working for change you will feel less powerless, so feelings of helplessness should be temporary. Many people find the support of a sympathetic group essential during consciousness-raising (Hart, 1990:59), and as we discuss in Chapter 7, critical reflection is often easier when a group works together.

Did you think of other potential problems which might emerge when educators analyse their situations?

Why Should Learners Analyse Their Situations?

Many of the reasons for and potential problems of educators analysing their situations discussed above apply equally to learners, but there are others which apply specifically to learners as we mention below. Before reading further, can you think of any reasons to encourage learners to analyse their situations?

Situation analysis helps to focus learning for relevance

Many learners enter a learning situation in a passive frame of mind, trusting the educator to impart something useful. Most of them leave without having learned much of value. Perhaps they can recite some facts about phenomena which have little or no bearing on their lives. Perhaps they can mechanistically perform a skill. Perhaps they can pass an examination giving access to yet another course. But have they developed as people? Are they more inquiring? Have they been stimulated to challenge injustice? Do they see a clear purpose for themselves, using their new knowledge, attitudes and skills to greatest advantage in their work?

Many educators assume that after students have 'gone through' their course, they will somehow be able to make the necessary connections in their minds, and miraculously be able to apply their learning in practice. In our experience, learning seldom becomes meaningful after the event: it becomes lost. To make learning more meaningful at the time, learners need a context for it. They need reasons for learning, and motivation to apply their learning immediately. If they are helped to analyse their situations as a fundamental part of the learning process, their subsequent learning will be much more focused and relevant than it could otherwise have been. Particularly important are the processes of role analysis (what will I need to be able to do in order to function competently in my work after this course? – see later in this chapter) and learning needs analysis (see Chapters 3 & 4).

It motivates learners

Learners who have had a chance to analyse their situations, define learning priorities, and identify their own strengths and weaknesses before a course, and who then tailor their learning to build on those strengths and overcome those weaknesses tend to be much more motivated than learners who are expected to passively accept and absorb what an educator presents to them.

Did you think of additional reasons to encourage learners to analyse their situations?

Potential Problems Of Learners Analysing Their Situations

Apart from the issues already discussed in the section above dealing with problems educators may encounter, can you think of others which learners may face when they analyse their situations?

It is difficult to facilitate in a heterogeneous group

In that a substantial part of situation analysis usually involves consciousness-raising, it is preferable to work with a fairly homogeneous group of learners who all have some common experience of a particular (racial, sexual, occupational etc) type of oppression so that their personal experiences can be the starting point for a deeper social analysis. As Hart (1990:59-62) points out, the 'oppressors' also need to become critically aware of their roles and become motivated to change, but this process is different from helping representatives of oppressed groups to 'find a voice' for themselves.

Learners may resist the process

Situation analysis and especially consciousness-raising using personal experience of oppression as a basis for social analysis may be threatening and upsetting for some learners, and the process may be deeply resisted as a result. Also, some learners who expect an academic setting to focus on impersonal approaches to learning may trivialize the role of personal experience in learning (Hart, 1990:60).

It may upset conservative colleagues

Many of the people learners deal with, both in the educational setting and at work, will not appreciate the challenging and critical approach which is developed when learners are in the habit of analysing their situations. They may have to cope with being labelled as 'trouble-makers' and all the consequences of this. If learners are helped to become critical and active, they will almost certainly pose a threat to others who want to maintain the status quo. So we need to help them analyse the risks and benefits of various courses of action as yet another phase of their situation analysis.

Description is not sufficient

> Analysis is not a mystery.... But often we go round and round in circles, describing but not analysing. (Hope & Timmel, 1984c:13)

Learners who are not used to analysis as a mental process often confuse description with analysis. In the past, at school, at church, in the family, watching television, even in college, they have been passive consumers of information. 'Facts' were presented to them and conclusions were drawn for them. No investigation was required; no critical thinking; no questioning or challenging. There was no expectation that they should seek personal meaning and then act on that meaning for themselves. Now, suddenly, we ask them to analyse; to synthesize; to evaluate conflicting data; to reach original conclusions; to defend their opinions; and to look at the world from a new perspective, taking nothing for granted, questioning even their most basic assumptions. We should not be surprised when things don't go too smoothly:

The Difficulty Of Encouraging Critical Thinking In Nurses: Reflections By Janet Giddy

(Janet had facilitated a session with the objective of stimulating critical thinking about the root causes of illness and disease in the rural South African communities where she and the nurses worked. Her co-worker started with a story about a child who died, and she then led a discussion using the 'But why?' method [see later in this chapter]. After the session, she noted her impressions.)

The discussion was at an all-time high and I had to stop people from interrupting each other. The group tended to 'victim blame' and some very conservative attitudes came out. They defended the migrant labour system and tried to avoid political discussion. In the end, some rather reluctantly conceded that political factors might influence health – there was a great hesitation in verbalizing this though. I felt the process of critical thinking did start, albeit in a very tentative and reluctant way. There is no doubt that people resist looking too closely at their established attitudes and values.

(A few days later, Janet got written evaluations about this and other sessions. They were overwhelmingly negative: most learners felt that nothing had been learned! Reflecting further, she notes:)

It seems as if people did not (or did not want to) remember some of the very interesting and valuable points they had made during the discussion. Obviously it was a whole new process with new concepts, and therefore a bit difficult to internalize and integrate into their established knowledge.

For many learners, the mental leap from passive consumption of 'facts' to active creation of personally meaningful knowledge will initially be too great. We have found that detailed description can help bridge the gap. The reflections below describe how we first became aware of the need for an initial 'description phase', and how we then tried to help learners move on from description to analysis.

From Description To Analysis

We were working with a group of nurses and doctors who were primary healthcare (PHC) educators. Some participants had been schooled under the notorious 'Bantu education' system in South Africa, and others had been in racially segregated, government-controlled schools which were authoritarian and did little to develop critical thinking. Their subsequent training in nursing colleges and medical schools was largely of the 'fact-transmission' variety. We strongly felt that if they were to do their jobs as PHC educators well, they would need to develop critical and analytical abilities. At the start of their course, we suggested that areas which would be especially important for each person to analyse were the community where they worked, and the health services which employed them. During the orientation period, we organized several activities to stimulate their thinking about how they could approach such analyses at their home-bases. For example, we arranged a community visit and a field trip to a local clinic, and facilitated preparatory and analytical discussions before and after each visit.

Participants submitted their own community and health service analyses to us for feedback as soon as they were ready. Because we received these one at a time (rather than on a pre-defined 'due date'), it took us some time to recognize the pattern that was emerging. Later, when we reviewed all the feedback we had been giving, we sounded like a stuck record! 'This is an excellent overview of how the health service is organized, but it is not yet an analysis...'; 'Your description of the situation is detailed and articulate, but you have not yet taken it that extra step to analysis'. So it was that we realized that the ability to analyse and think critically is not inherent, but is a skill that needs to be practised and refined. We designed a handout, 'From description to analysis', for the participants (see Appendix 3 for extracts from it). We also asked them to consider our individual feedback and to re-draft their initial reports, sometimes even a third time, before we accepted them as 'evidence' that a person could critically analyse their situation.

Did these interventions help? Very much so. By the end of the first year of their course, we had reviewed analyses on 42 different topics from the 12 participants. Most of them were community and health service analyses, but others were analyses of learning groups, learning needs, educational resources, disease profiles and curricula. Three of the nurse participants produced reports which were subsequently adapted and accepted for publication in the national nursing journal. Apart from improving their own analytical skills, when asked about their work at the end of their course, all nine people (75 per cent) who responded to the questionnaire said that they involved their PHC students in community and/or health service analyses so that they could participate in drafting their curriculum based on the health needs they had personally identified. Thus the finest success had been achieved: a 'ripple effect' could be seen. We encouraged the educators to become more critical; they encouraged their PHC learners. Maybe after their courses, these PHC learners would encourage community members in turn?

It takes time

Some educators say that they would love to be able to help learners develop critical awareness and analytical thinking skills, but that they simply 'have no time' in the curriculum. These same people often complain that they have no time to build an open learning climate initially (see Chapter 1), or to involve learners in drafting their own curricula (see Chapters 3-5) and managing and evaluating their own learning (see Chapters 6-8). It is true that all these things take time – often much more than we originally budgeted. But we believe educators should ask not whether they can afford the time, but rather: can we afford not to take the necessary time to help learners become critical and self-directing? This requires a shift in thinking. It is not what we have to teach which matters, but what the learners will learn. And also how they will learn it; how they will feel about themselves, their peers, their educators, and other resource-people with whom they interact. And how prepared they will be to continue creative and independent work and learning after the course.

The investment in time will of course be intensive. But the rewards far outweigh the costs. Learners develop skills and approaches to problems which will make them more confident, critical, effective and innovative for the rest of their lives. In addition, they will be unusually motivated as learners, and the learning that they do during and after the course will be much more relevant than it could have been if you had excluded them from the process of situation analysis.

Did you think of other potential problems to avoid?

Levels Of Analysis: Digging Deeper

To conclude this first section overviewing the concept of situation analysis, we suggest that educators (and learners) can start analysing their situations by considering the roles learners will play after their studies, and then 'dig deeper' to include sector and socio-economic-political analysis before finally analysing the curriculum in detail.

We find it useful to begin a detailed situation analysis with 'role analysis', asking: what roles will learners fill after the course? Thereafter, we move on to 'sector analysis' and ask: what intra- and inter-sectorial issues may affect the course and its graduates? In 'socio-economic-political analysis' we ask: within what kind of social, political and economic system do the course and its graduates operate? Finally, we can focus on 'curriculum analysis': what is taught, why, by whom, to whom, where, when and how?

Too often, educators see their primary task as being to 'design curricula'. We argue that this can properly be done only after a critical situation analysis. As we said earlier, the purpose of analysing our situations is to locate ourselves and our work in context, so that our actions, responses and initiatives as educators are most relevant and effective under the circumstances. Our situations are complex and affected by many factors, and analysis of them should include considerations of all the aspects mentioned above. Only once these aspects of the situation have been analysed can informed and critical decisions be made about curriculum design.

Can you think of any other aspects of the situation which are not included here but which educators and/or learners should analyse? The periodic review below can be used if you want to remind yourself of some of the issues discussed so far in this chapter. Thereafter, we consider each of the levels of analysis mentioned above. Each section below begins with a brief self-assessment exercise so you can assess your existing strengths and weaknesses. Depending on your ratings, you may want to skip ahead to aspects in which you rate *yourself low. In other words, use the self-assessments to 'analyse your situation' with respect to your current learning needs about situation analysis. A word of caution before heading into the rest of this chapter: a comprehensive situation analysis may seem overwhelming; it's a long and complex process made worse by the fact that situations change constantly and our perceptions of them change as we learn more. Don't give up before you begin. Start somewhere, tackle what interests you most now, and take it from there. Even one step further down the road than you used to go is a step well worth taking.*

Periodic Review

1. If your colleagues and/or learners are not in the habit of analysing their situations critically, which rationales would you use to try to convince them of the need to do so?
2. How could you tactfully warn your colleagues and/or learners about potential problems to avoid when analysing their situations? Which problems are they most likely to encounter and why?
3. So far in this chapter, the focus has been on why situation analysis is so important. In preparation for the next sections, you may want to think about how (ie using what strategies) situation analysis can be promoted.

Role Analysis

What roles do learners with whom you work fill after their course? Does their course adequately prepare them for those roles? What roles might they fill in the future? Is their course preparing them for that as well? (See Chapter 3 for more detailed discussion.)

Self-Assessment: Role Analysis

For suggestions about how to use a self-assessment exercise, please see the start of this chapter.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

- analyse the role that course participants will perform after the course (both immediately and in the foreseeable future) to ensure that their learning will be as relevant and useful as possible
- encourage learners to critically analyse their social and occupational roles in relation to the needs of society, and especially the needs of oppressed and exploited groups, before deciding on their priority learning needs
- help learners distinguish between an 'ideal role' they could play in an 'ideal society', and a more 'realistic role' they can play in the interim while working towards a better society

- use appropriate strategies to help myself and the learners with whom I work to complete role analyses, including:
  - community surveys and visits
  - role-plays

My additional ideas about role analysis:

Total:

What Is Role Analysis?

We find the most logical place to begin analysing our educational situations is to consider the roles that learners on our course will be expected to play after their studies. Equally important, the learners themselves need to analyse their future roles. For them to participate as full partners in their education, be internally motivated, and see themselves as agents of social justice, we believe they need to know why they are learning (a vision of the role they will later fill) and what specific competencies they need to function effectively in that role.

There is a tension here between the 'ideal role' you'd like to see learners perform in an 'ideal society', and a somewhat tempered, less ambitious role that may be more compatible with current social and political realities. We believe learners need and deserve to consider both: the former to inspire and motivate them with a utopian vision of the world and their work as it one day might be (if we all keep working towards the goal of a just society), and the latter to prevent them from feeling disillusioned or even crushed by the harsh realities they will face in practice. Sector and socio-economic-political analysis (see next two sections) helps learners locate their work in current realities.

Strategies To Encourage Role Analysis

Community surveys and visits

The comments below are extracted from the learning diary (see Chapter 7) of Stephen Knight. The approach to negotiated curriculum design he used with a group of South African primary healthcare nursing students was logical and community-supportive; evaluations by learners indicated that they developed a clear conception of and commitment to their future roles as progressive health workers. The events he describes took place during the second week of a year-long course. In the first week, the learning group had participated in a climate-building workshop (see Chapter 1).

The Process Of Role Analysis With Learners: Stephen Knight's Reflections

> It was agreed on Friday last week that identifying community needs is an important step in the process of the group designing a curriculum for the year. To

do this, participants agreed to make a community visit. Their objective was to come to the village as friends, and to learn about commonly perceived community needs from community members – not to solve problems or give advice. The feeling of inadequacy in the group was great, especially as interview techniques were not something they felt confident with. We then used a story (about a child with malnutrition and a migrant worker father) as a discussion-starter. The 'But why?' technique [see later in this chapter] was used to analyse the root causes of problems in the community, and the victim-blaming attitude of many health workers was highlighted by the group. A 'simulated interview' as we envisaged it would occur then took place.

Some of the community problems which emerged in discussion afterwards included migrant labour, low income, inadequate education, poor transport and telephone communication ... (list continues). The next process was identifying the health needs of people and communities. Paediatric in-patient registers were studied, and various workers at the hospital (doctors, matrons, administrators, labourers) were interviewed. On Wednesday, the group visited a local clinic and interviewed the primary healthcare nurse working there as well as the patients. On the way back, they visited a traditional healer. The following community health needs were generated by the group: enough clean water, toilets and waste disposal, treatment of common diseases, knowledge of how to grow enough to feed families, transport to and communication with the health services, mother care, child care ... (list continues).

Based on what we had learned and experienced, we then prepared a statement about a proposed role for PHC nurses:

- to believe in other people's worth
- to work as part of a health team
- to be able to work independently as well
- to be competent to render health services: maternal and child health services, family planning, ante-natal care ... (list continues)
- to participate in planning, implementing and evaluating PHC
- to know the community's needs and how to meet these needs
- to know how to use essential drugs and vaccines
- to be an ongoing learner.

Finally, learning objectives were prepared and a programme for the year was drafted.

Do you see how the process you use to help learners analyse their role will affect the conclusions they reach? Consider, for example, what might have happened if this group had not made the community visit or done the interviews with patients.

We particularly like the emphasis Steve placed on community needs analysis as a prior step in the process of role analysis. We have found that the commitment of health workers changes radically when they stop thinking of themselves as being in training to 'get qualified' or 'become a health worker', and start perceiving themselves as learning to work with people to meet their health needs.

Is there a similar shift in focus that learners with whom you work need to make?

Many educators use visits of observation and field trips to broaden learners' experience. Such visits can either be time-wasting or powerful learning stimuli, depending on how learners are prepared ('briefed'), and then encouraged to analyse their experiences afterwards ('de-briefed'). A common mistake is to let the visit itself go on too long, leaving no time for discussion and reflection (see Chapter 7) afterwards.

Why is preparation before a visit so important?

You may be clear about what you hope learners will observe during the visit, but learners will not have the same background knowledge, experience or interests as you. They may focus on unexpected aspects, or even find the visit irrelevant. If they do not have an organized mental framework to guide their observations and thinking, they may feel either bored or overwhelmed. This is especially likely if you send people into very unfamiliar situations, or paradoxically, if you expect them to critically re-examine a situation which is familiar and therefore taken for granted by them.

How do you usually prepare learners before a visit, without biasing the observations they make?

We schedule a preparation session in which the group brainstorms a series of questions they want answers to by the end of the visit. If possible, we try to phrase a controversial, general question which summarizes the whole purpose of the visit. The extract below explains this process further.

Helping Learners Prepare For A Community Visit

We have worked with many groups of privileged, urban, medical students in South Africa during their first rural exposure. Before taking them to visit a community clinic, we explain that the basic question we'd like them to answer is: Is the clinic providing adequate 'primary healthcare' (PHC) or merely 'second class care for poor citizens'? In the preparatory session, we ask them to work in small groups to generate a list of the information and observations they will need to answer that question. Examples of questions they often ask include: Are the staff adequately trained in clinical and community aspects of PHC? Are there sufficient staff to provide a 24-hour service? Are the facilities (equipment, drugs and medical supplies, lights, water etc) adequate? Is there evidence of meaningful community involvement in the health service? With this kind of orientation, most learners are enthusiastic, active and focused during the visits, and they look forward to the debate which will follow. Without it, many learners tend to adopt a ho-hum attitude or else get bogged down in unnecessary detail about just one or two issues.

Did you think of other ways to orientate learners before a visit?

Role plays

Role plays can be an extremely powerful technique. Actors and audience become emotionally involved in a way which seldom happens, and this opens us all to deep, meaningful learning. However, learners may feel shy and embarrassed if they have never been exposed to role plays before. As part of your situation analysis about the learning group, you should assess the suitability of using the technique, with or without prior theoretical or practical orientation. We usually introduce the idea of role plays gradually. For example, the first time we use them, we act. Next time, we ask for volunteers to act out parts which we describe to them. Finally, once people are clear about the purpose of role plays as problem-posing (not answer-providing) tools, we ask participants to design and act in their own role plays. They can also lead discussions after the plays by asking: What did you see happening in the role play? Does this kind of thing happen in real life? Why? How did you feel about it? What can we do about it? *(Fordyce & Weil, 1971:168-70; Hope & Timmel, 1984a:58-9; Johnson & Johnson, 1975:11-12; Simpson, 1985a; Vella, 1979:33-9; Werner & Bower, 1982:14.1-14.14)*

We have often used brief (1-5 minute) role plays as discussion-starters about the roles learners will be expected to play in future. In our work with rural nurses, for example, we asked learners to act the roles of poverty-stricken patients listening to a conventional 'victim-blaming' health education session conducted by a health worker who seemed unaware of their daily struggle for survival ('You must eat sufficient protein every day: fish, eggs, meat...' when the patients do not have enough money to eat plain porridge every day). After such plays, the nurses would be deeply touched by having 'experienced' a few minutes in the lives of their future clients.

Did you think of other strategies to encourage role analysis in your work? You may find some of the strategies to encourage reflection mentioned in Chapter 7 to be useful here as well.

Sector Analysis

Analysing the 'ideal roles' learners would play in an 'ideal society' is a motivating and worthwhile exercise. But as we've said, it would not be fair on learners to leave the analysis at that level. To avoid disillusionment, they must consider existing constraints and obstacles, and develop a realistic image of their future roles. We find sector (and socio-economic-political) analysis to be a major aid in this regard.

Self-Assessment: Sector Analysis

Please see the start of this chapter for ideas about how to use a self-assessment exercise. The details here will vary depending on the sector(s) within which you work. The competencies listed below relate to the educational sector only, since this would be relevant for any course co-ordinator to consider. If you are educating, say, health workers, you may want to analyse the health sector as well.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

- critically analyse the sector(s) within which I work by answering questions such as: ☐ ☐ ☐
  - where does the power in this sector lie, and why? ☐ ☐ ☐
  - what vested interests can I identify, and how will I respond to these? ☐ ☐ ☐
  - how is power and control within an educational course usually distributed, and what will I need to do to alter this in a SDL course? ☐ ☐ ☐
  - are educational programmes within this sector appropriate? Why/not? ☐ ☐ ☐
  - what changes are needed and how can I contribute to achieving them? ☐ ☐ ☐
  - how can innovative programmes in this sector be introduced and protected? (see Chapter 9) ☐ ☐ ☐
  - is accreditation by an educational institution and/or an external agency required for graduates of my programme to function effectively? If so, what compromises am I prepared to make to ensure accreditation? (see Chapter 9) ☐ ☐ ☐
- encourage learners to analyse the sectors within which they work too ☐ ☐ ☐
- use appropriate strategies to help myself and the learners with whom I work to analyse relevant sectors, including: ☐ ☐ ☐
  - asking critical questions ☐ ☐ ☐
  - 'naming' or labelling phenomena ☐ ☐ ☐
  - drawing ☐ ☐ ☐
  - open dialogue ☐ ☐ ☐

My additional ideas about sector analysis: ☐ ☐ ☐

Total: ☐ ☐ ☐

What Is Sector Analysis?

Society consists of many different sectors (commercial, agricultural, cultural, industrial, educational, health and so on), each consisting in turn of several sub-sectors and each sector interacting with several others. The organization of each sector and sub-sector is influenced by the socio-economic-political structure of the society as a whole (see next section), and pro-active functioning within a sector demands that we critically analyse it before planning strategies to either maintain or change it. *(Gramsci in Entwistle, 1979; Hammond, 1986d; Hammond, Buch & Zwi, 1986; Hammond & de Beer, 1986; Illich, 1970; Navarro, 1976a, 1976b; Shor, 1980; Waitzkin & Waterman, 1974)*

Critical thinking about a sector involves questioning the taken-for-granted. During our work in South Africa in the mid-1980s, for example, we raised questions about the apartheid South African health sector and the sub-sectors within it. Why were hospitals and clinics racially segregated? Why did private hospitals exist alongside state, provincial and 'homeland' institutions? Why was there no national health system guaranteeing universal access? Why were rural areas so under-served? Why did nurses earn less than doctors? Why were traditional healers not formally recognized? To answer these kinds of questions we had to consider such issues as the capitalist economy and the social classes it creates, the politically entrenched racism which served the economic interests of the dominant class, and the elitism and sexism in the social system. In other words, many of the issues in sector analysis lead further to a broader socio-economic-political analysis:

> We need to understand the broader economic, political, and ideological context in order to develop realistic strategies for change in any one area (of society). (Arnold et al, 1985b:61)

Strategies To Encourage Sector Analysis

Asking critical questions

What kinds of questions should be asked about the educational sector to stimulate critical thinking?

The list of questions below was developed by a group of Canadian adult educators who wanted to analyse and compare their work situations. You may find some of these questions useful to supplement your own ideas.

Analysis of adult education programmes

Economic aspects

- Where does the funding come from?
- How does the funding shape the programme?
- How has funding changed over time?
- How do the constituents make a living?
- Who benefits economically from the programme? In what ways?
- How are the educational objectives related to economic goals?

Political aspects

- What is the constituency served by the programme?
- What social classes are represented?
- Who initiated the programme?
- How are decisions made? Who makes them?
- What other organizations/institutions is the programme linked to?
- Who are potential allies/adversaries?

- What role does the state play?

Ideological aspects

- What educational principles are espoused by the programme?
- What methods are applied?
- What is the educational content? Who determines it? ...
- How are participants empowered or disempowered?
- Who understands how the programme functions?
- What ideological perspective(s) is(are) underlying the programme?

(Arnold et al, 1985b:61)

We use the questions 'What is really happening here?' and 'What does this mean?' when we take Shor's (1980) advice and 're-examine' ordinary, everyday events. For example, instead of simply accepting a board's decision not to fund an educational innovation you suggested, you could ask 'What is really happening here?' In trying to answer, you may think about power and how it is used (and abused) in educational institutions; about conflicting interests in education; about the very purpose of education. Then, once you have thought the issues through, you will be in a position to plan a more effective response. The same questions can be used to stimulate thinking in many day-to-day circumstances: after an emotional interaction with a colleague or learner; in a meeting; while reading a newspaper report; when looking at a photograph, and so on. In addition, you could ask these questions in a group session designed specifically to analyse your situation. Arnold et al (1985b:53-62) recommend staff meetings to analyse relevant media clips, and a technique they call 'the social tree' to ask critical questions about the economic, social and political, and ideological aspects of a situation. Hope & Timmel (1984c:18-47) also make useful suggestions about using media and other approaches to deepen critical awareness.

'Naming' or labelling

Because most situations we analyse are by nature complex, we find it useful to separate out various elements and 'name' or label them. For example, in analysing the nursing sub-sector, we may use labels like 'bureaucrats', 'professionalizers', 'vocationalists' and 'elitists'. A common criticism is that these are just 'big words' which will confuse or even mystify issues. We agree that jargon is negative if used to impress rather than to clarify. However, 'big words' often represent important and complex concepts crucial for critical thinking. 'Will this clarify or confuse?' This is the question we must ask when we label something. Will concepts like 'underdevelopment' and 'oppression' help learners to understand the world better, or will they confuse them? As we said in Chapter 1, educators who try to protect learners from terms which encapsulate complex ideas may rob them of the chance to develop appropriate 'mental tools' to think more critically about their world. In trying to liberate learners from the effort of coming to grips with fundamental concepts, then, we may inadvertently oppress them.

Drawing as an aid

You may find that a diagram, drawing, graph, pictogram, force-field analysis chart, or cartoon can represent the situation more succinctly than other methods of analysing. Some popular educators recommend 'collective drawing' in workshops. Often, new insights occur as a small group tries to depict the relationships between elements of a situation in drawings rather than merely talking about them. *(Arnold & Burke, 1983:39-42; Farlow, 1986:7-9)*

We find drawings like the one below especially helpful when we are educating people whose work locates them in another sector as well as in the educational one. Then we want to analyse that sector as well. For example, when working with nurses, the health sector and the nursing sub-sector within it are of interest. Figure 3 and the explanation below show how we located our work as co-ordinators of one course.

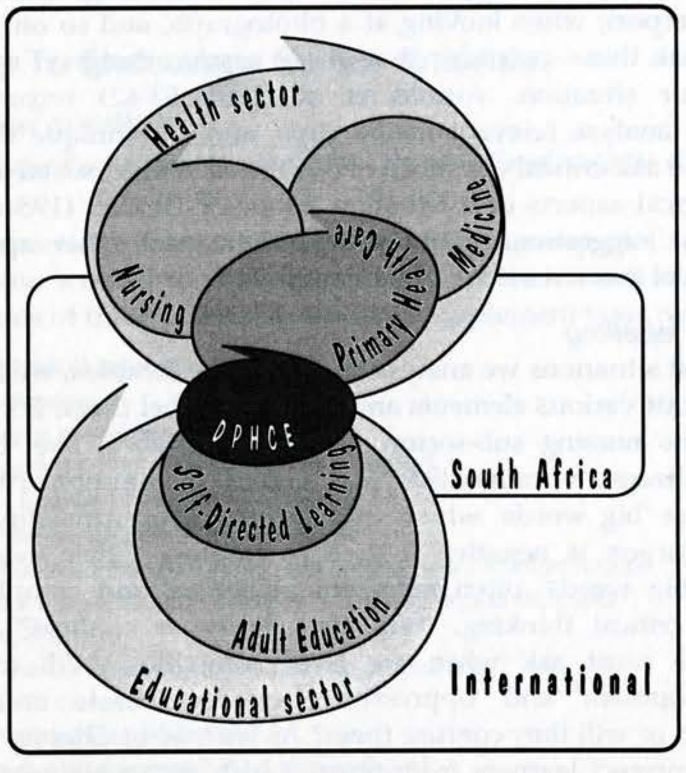

Figure 3 *Locating a course in its broader context*

We represent the Diploma in Primary Health Care (PHC) Education course as the shaded, central area in the figure because it was the focus of our work. The course – a South African initiative – is the only part confined within the inner box, representing the national situation. The other sectors and sub-sectors all have national and international components, and thus extend into the larger box representing the international situation.

We find it useful to 'locate' our work in this way. Why? It prepares us for the different pressures that will be brought to bear on us. For example, we had to cope with the problems inherent in the apartheid South African political economy; with nursing hierarchies and the professional relationships between nurses and doctors; with PHC still being a relatively new and often misunderstood specialty; and with most local learners and educators being unfamiliar with SDL. Being aware of these issues in advance helped us plan appropriate strategies to cope with potential pitfalls.

Open dialogue

Having analysed your situation, you could discuss your conclusions – and confusions – with colleagues you respect and trust. Your reasoning may be challenged and your thinking extended when you open your analysis to critique. Don't get depressed if you find your conclusions being challenged and you feel the need to re-think your analysis. No analysis is ever complete or 'correct': it is an ongoing process.

You may want to refer to Chapter 7 where strategies to encourage reflection are discussed, since several of those might also stimulate sector analysis. The specific techniques we choose to extend or increase our analyses are not so important. What is important is that we consciously attempt to become more aware, more critical, and then more active in seeking appropriate solutions for the problems we identify in our particular situations. Are there issues concerning sector analysis we have not raised which you should consider in your situation? Next, we broaden our focus still further and consider socio-economic-political analysis.

Socio-Economic-Political Analysis

In this section we are concerned with macro-level analysis about the very structure and functioning of the society within which we work. The social forms and economic and political systems will largely determine what happens within each sector, and ultimately within each role filled in each sector. This is not to say that educators in oppressive societies – or in societies with oppressive features such as racism or sexism – are powerless to implement social change. However, we must first become aware of the obstacles facing us and must plan our strategies accordingly.

Self-Assessment: Socio-Economic-Political Analysis

For suggestions about how to use a self-assessment exercise, please see the start of this chapter.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

- critically analyse the effects of the social, economic and political system on individuals, communities, sectors and services
- use my analysis to develop realistic expectations, recognize the constraints on constructive action, avoid complacency, and work for change having considered the limitations imposed by particular circumstances or times
- encourage learners to do the same so that their learning will be directed towards how they can personally respond to social, economic and political injustices
- use appropriate strategies to encourage critical situation analysis including:
  - discussion-starters and 'codes'
  - asking 'But why?'
  - 'sculpturing'
  - theatre and drama
  - using and making media
  - scheduling time for and encouraging critical analysis

My additional ideas about socio-economic-political analysis:

Total:

What Is Socio-Economic-Political Analysis?

How often do we stop to critically analyse (not merely complain about) our society? Much of the time, we accept it as something over which we have no control. We take it for granted, and do little or nothing to change it. But without analysing social, economic and political systems, how can we ensure relevance in our work? How can we work for justice, equality and freedom if we and the learners with whom we work do not first analyse and become critically aware of the injustice, inequality and oppression which surrounds and numbs us? If we are fundamentally concerned with issues of social justice, then, our first challenge is to become conscientized:

> Unless ... critical consciousness is developed, one's actions tend, historically, though unwittingly, to reinforce the prevailing [social] order. (Reed, 1981:7)

We find analysis of the social, economic and political system to be crucial in determining our approach to the courses, workshops and other learning events we facilitate. No education takes place in a vacuum. The total context within which we as educators and learners live and work has a major effect on us, and we have to make a clear decision about whose interests we want to serve. For example, who should we be educating (primarily women or men; unemployed or employed; rural or urban; illiterate or literate learners)? What content is important for them (theoretical content or practical skills; historical data or analyses of current events)? How should the education be organized and administered (full or part time; teacher- or learner-directed; emphasizing individual or group work)? Where should it take place (in rural or urban settings; in classrooms or in practical situations) and when (during or after working hours)? Who are the most appropriate educators and role models (specialists or generalists; professional teachers or lay people with relevant experience)? Our answers to these questions often change dramatically after we critically analyse the social, economic and political situations within which we work.

The issue of macro-level analysis and consciousness-raising has been dealt with in creative ways by many authors. We have found the following sources most useful. *(Arnold et al, 1985b; Arnold & Burke, 1983; Bernstein, 1973; Christie, 1985; Elling, 1981; Farlow, 1986; Freire, 1970a [Chapter 3]; George & Paige, 1982; Gramsci in Entwistle, 1979; Hammond, 1986a, 1986b, 1986c; Harrison, 1982; Hart, 1990; Hope & Timmel, 1984a, 1984b, 1984c; Illich, 1970; National Education Crisis Committee, 1987; Navarro, 1976a, 1976b; Reed, 1981; Shor, 1980; Waitzkin & Waterman, 1974; Werner & Bower, 1982 [Part 5])*

Strategies To Encourage Socio-Economic-Political Analysis

The statement below reminds us that we need to be familiar with a variety of strategies, so that we can introduce an appropriate technique to help a learning group at any particular time.

> Generally speaking one technique is usually not sufficient to investigate a theme. Usually it needs to be combined with others to allow a group to deepen its understanding of the areas under consideration. (Arnold et al, 1985b: 78)

Discussion-starters and 'codes'

Freire (1970a:Chapter 3) suggests that community workers listen to the concerns of the people and so identify issues of greatest concern to them. He calls these 'generative themes', and the role of an animator is to prepare 'codes' (such as stories, pictures, poems, songs, simulation exercises, questions, quotations by authority figures) which would pose problems about the generative themes and promote discussion, problem-solving and development of critical consciousness in community groups (also see Hope & Timmel, 1984a:6-17; Hart, 1990). Other adult and popular educators have adapted Freire's ideas. Some of the codes we have used were discussed in Chapter 1. The sources below have been most useful in our search for ways to initiate meaningful discussions. *(Crone & Hunter, 1980;*

Fordyce & Weil, 1971; Hope & Timmel, 1984a, 1984b, 1984c; Johnson & Johnson, 1975; Kennedy, 1990; Werner & Bower, 1982)

Ask 'But why?'

'But why?' is a question which can help people to 'dig deeper' in discussions and lead to deeper insights, as each answer prompts another 'but why?' question. We have found it most useful in analysing the socio-economic-political causes of problems we face in our work, and often use it in conjunction with story-telling, as we describe below. *(Hope & Timmel, 1984a:59; Werner & Bower, 1982:Chapter 26)*

> **Asking 'But Why?'**
>
> Mrs Maluleke has four children, one boy and three girls. They live in a rural area in South Africa. Unfortunately, only the son is attending school. She hasn't got money to send the other three. But why hasn't she got money? (And another question to return to later: but why does she decide to send the boy to school, not one of her daughters?) Well, her husband is a migrant worker earning very little money. But why does he earn so little? (And also: but why is he a migrant labourer?) He does unskilled work, and it is poorly paid. But why is he unskilled? (And another question for later: but why is unskilled work poorly paid?) Well, he never went to school, so he can't read or write and therefore he has to do unskilled work. But why did he not go to school? (And: but why has he not had access to literacy training as an adult?) Because his parents were too poor to afford it. But why were his parents so poor? (And: but why are poor people denied access to decent education in this society?) And so on.

The 'But why?' technique can become very complex in a short period of time, as we have illustrated with the additional questions in brackets above. Don't get confused by all the different directions you could go in, and try to follow one line of questioning to a logical conclusion, making a note of other questions you could return to later. This is especially important if you are leading a discussion with learners who are not accustomed to analysis: it could become overwhelmingly complex. It is always a challenge to keep adequate notes (eg on a board or flip-chart) during such discussions: we find 'creative patterns' most appropriate (see Buzan, 1982:86-115). Sometimes, we tape-record a discussion – with participants' agreement, of course – and make fuller notes afterwards.

'Sculpturing'

> Sculpturing is an exercise that uses people (rather than clay) to create a visual image of a particular theme. (Farlow, 1986:9)

To create a 'human sculpture', people are asked to position themselves (and any 'props' like chairs, tables, coats and so on) in ways which will represent the public and hidden relationships between various elements in a situation. This helps people visualize complex relationships. In one workshop, for example, Arnold and Burke (1983:30) asked participants to make a sculpture showing how the North American media was portraying the war in Nicaragua. Someone stood up on a chair, representing the Soviet Union, while someone else stood near this person on the floor, representing Cuba. Another person representing the USA stood on a chair (to show power) on the far side of the room (to show ideological distance from the Soviets and Cubans)...

Sculpturing is an unusual technique, demanding active participation, and is a lot of fun once the initial resistance to a new idea has been overcome. A photograph of a human sculpture makes a unique memento of a learner's participation in a workshop. Sculpturing is also a quick way to assess understanding in a group before discussing a topic in more detail. A follow-up sculpture using new information could even be used to conclude.

Theatre and drama

As we discussed earlier, role plays are very brief, and their major function is to stimulate discussion about issues raised in the play. On the other hand, longer plays may explore issues and suggest solutions. Puppet shows, village theatre and other forms of sociodrama are excellent ways to stimulate the process of situation analysis. *(Arnold & Burke, 1983:33-5; Farlow, 1986:6-7; Kidd & Byram, 1982; Werner & Bower, 1982:Chapter 27)*

Using and making media

In the same way that role plays and sociodramas may stimulate thinking, a movie, video or slide show can be used. Even simple printed media like newspapers, books and magazines may serve the purpose. However, as Habermas (1973:4) warns, mass media tend to control 'the loyalty of a depoliticized population' rather than to promote enlightenment or liberation. For this reason, Arnold & Burke (1983:50) suggest it may be more appropriate to help groups design and make their own media.

Schedule time for and encourage analysis

Some things we do to encourage learners to analyse their situations include scheduling frequent, formal opportunities to practise analysing; being supportive and encouraging when learners start becoming more critical; providing specially designed resources like the one in Appendix 3; offering constructive criticism and feedback; exposing learners to others who are routinely critical in their approaches and analyses; and trying to be good role models ourselves. Can you think of other ideas?

An example of the kind of analysis that educators can make when they are encouraged to think critically is provided below. The extract is from a document compiled in 1987 by educators from the Ubuntu Social Development Institute (USDI) at the Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre in South Africa. We facilitated a series of workshops in adult education for the group, and in the first of these we asked participants to work in small groups to analyse the situation they felt themselves to be in at the time. At the end of the session, they pooled ideas and decided to summarize them in a document they called the 'USDI Resource-People's Manifesto':

USDI Resource-People's Manifesto

The Global Situation

- We recognize that the struggle for justice, liberation and equality being waged in South Africa is only one of many such struggles internationally....
- We recognize that many of South Africa's problems are also world problems. We consider ourselves members of an international community....

The National Situation

- We have to deal with a legacy of exploitation, expropriation, colonization, oppression and apartheid. Our land is fragmented; our nation divided.
- But a groundswell of progressive change ... has developed.
- People working for change have a vision of a post-apartheid South Africa....
- Within the broad movement for change, there are deep ideological conflicts which prevent groups from working together as effectively as they might.
- As the pressure for radical change from the masses increases, so the violence and repression of the state and its lackeys increases. Consequently, many of our leaders and our colleagues have been, are, or will be silenced, either temporarily or permanently.

The Education Situation In South Africa

- The conventional education system is in crisis. Apart from structural problems ... there is a crisis of confidence in the whole system from students and parents alike.
- Pressures are mounting for 'People's Education', alternative education, and 'education for liberation'.
- People are rejecting the oppressive content and process of conventional education, and are calling for new strategies, institutions and systems ... for the future society.
- People are calling for relevance, for participation, for empowerment.
- We recognize these calls; and will strive to offer education which is truly alternative – both in content and in process.

USDI And Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre

- The Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre is a microcosm of the rest of South Africa, and is therefore not isolated from the violence, tension and uncertainty of the society at large. It is at once a very difficult and a very exciting place to work.
- We recognize that many of us hold political, social, economic and religious beliefs which differ significantly from others of us. We try to accept these differences and to work supportively with our colleagues, without agreeing with their beliefs as such.
- But while the differences between us may be considerable in some spheres, we are nevertheless united in our over-riding commitment to progressive change in South Africa. We work for, and we long for freedom, justice, equality and peace for all.

As Individuals

- As individuals, we want to work progressively and to promote the liberation of those with whom we work – in whatever small ways we can.
- As educators and as resource people, therefore, we seek to build the confidence of learners, promote co-operation between learners, build links between learners and resource people, encourage critical and creative thinking, and share with participants the power and control which has conventionally been held by 'teachers' and 'staff'.
- While we strive for these ideals, we also recognize that we ourselves are products of the distorted educational system and society we have referred to above. As such, we know that we will make mistakes, but trust that we will be able to learn and grow as a result.

What may be the advantages of educators working together to develop an analysis like the one above?

This analysis links problems at a national and even international level to those experienced at a personal, day-to-day level. It encourages people to 'think globally, but act locally', which is far preferable to either of the other extremes: either becoming so overwhelmed by macro-level problems that you become paralysed into empty theorizing; or ignoring macro-level problems and 'doing something practical', without realizing that you will probably reproduce existing injustices in your own work. Have you managed to find a balance between these two extremes in your life and work?

A statement like the 'manifesto' above may be especially useful where many people work together. It brings them together around a shared philosophy, helps them clarify their ideas, and provides a point of reference against which to evaluate their practice. It may also be useful to show to donors and potential members of staff. Finally, we believe learners have the right to know the philosophical and ideological base for a course before deciding whether or not to enrol. Did you think of other advantages?

What might be the disadvantages of making public a statement like the 'manifesto' quoted above?

The major disadvantage we can think of is that if the staff do not live up to the high ideals they have stated, they may be criticized for not 'practising what they preach'. The problem of some staff not practising consistently with a stated philosophy is especially likely to happen when a large group was responsible for drafting the statement. Peer pressure may cause some educators to commit themselves superficially to statements which they would never have made on their own. On the other hand, some educators may become radicalized as a result of analysing the socio-economic-political situation. Then, having committed themselves to lofty principles, they may be better motivated to live up to them in practice.

Curriculum Analysis

We are ready now to focus on the curriculum as such. Many educators make the mistake of beginning their analysis here where we have chosen to end it. The result is often inappropriate and irrelevant curriculum planning. Before any curriculum planning, we find it crucial to locate our educational work in its socio-economic-political and sectorial contexts, and to consider the roles learners will play after their studies.

Self-Assessment: Curriculum Analysis

Ideas about how to use a self-assessment exercise are provided at the start of the chapter.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

- critically analyse aspects of the curriculum in its broadest sense including:
  - curriculum content analysis: what is (should be) learned and why?
  - resource analysis: what learning resources are (should be) used?
  - resource people analysis: who is (should be) facilitating learning?
  - learning group analysis: who is (should be) learning?
  - location and venue analysis: where does (should) learning occur?
- state in writing the goals and philosophy of the course so that these are open to private and public scrutiny and improvement

My additional ideas about curriculum analysis:

Total:

What Is Meant By 'Curriculum'?

What do you usually mean when you speak of 'the curriculum'?

When educators refer to 'curriculum', they most commonly mean what learners are learning or the content of a course. However, most curriculum theorists agree that curriculum involves much more than this too. They encourage us to consider what is taught and why, by whom, to whom, where, when, and how. *(Goodlad, 1979; Griffin, 1983; Harris et al, 1975; Hooper, 1971; Hoyle, 1976; Kelly, 1977; Stenhouse, 1975; Tyler, 1949; Zais, 1976)*

Some Critical Questions About Your Curriculum

The specific questions below may stimulate you to think more critically about the work you do or should do. Note that these questions do not raise the crucial prior issue of the need for a course. Rather, they assume such a need, and simply question how the course is (to be) implemented and why.

Why was the course you co-ordinate started? Is it conceived of like a conventional university course, aiming to 'broadly educate' people, or more like a technical college course, aiming to train people to do a specific job?

- Whichever the case, is this the most appropriate approach for your constituency? Why?
- Or is your course envisaged as a combination of the two?
- If so, is it possible to succeed at this when universities and polytechnics generally only succeed at one or the other? Why/not?

How do you organize the curriculum content?

- Do you use a subject-centred design, a problem-centred design, or a learner-centred design? Why?
- If a learner-centred design has been chosen, will it be a competency-based design, a core curriculum plus option design, a remediation and exemption design, or a self-directed design? Why has this choice been made?

How is curriculum time allocated?

- Is provision made for learners to work at their own pace (flexi-time design), or are they tied to a fixed-time design? Why?

What approach is taken towards learners?

- Are they viewed and treated as full human beings, autonomous, responsible, and self-directing; or as empty vessels waiting to be filled, dependent, needing to be controlled and directed? Why?
- Educators seldom consciously set out to treat learners in this last-mentioned way, but it is nevertheless the most common effect of an educational intervention. If this is not the goal of your course, what specific steps are being taken to ensure that it does not happen in practice? Are these steps adequate? If not, what can be done?

Who do you want to educate?

- What selection criteria are used? Why?
- Are there adequate numbers of female learners in the group? What about the urban-rural mix, and the ages, races, and other characteristics of learners?
- Do you try to ensure some commonality of interest and ability in the learning group? If so, how? If not, how will you handle a heterogeneous group in practice?

Where do you educate people?

- Is the most appropriate venue the one you are using? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this as a venue?
- Have you considered the use of distance-learning methods (so that people can apply their learning in a real-life setting) for at least part of the course? If so, are your resource people sufficiently skilled at managing distance learning?
- Have you considered decentralizing the training to some extent (eg send participants home after a while, and arrange for a resource person to visit a regional centre to hear how learners are coping, to give support and provide guidance where necessary)? Why/not?

- If you use field projects, are you sure that the resource people in the field can provide a learning opportunity that will be more beneficial than a period of self-directed learning at the learners' home-bases?

Who is responsible for the various curriculum components?

- Student counselling?
- Day-to-day administration of the course?
- Resource development?
- Facilitation of sessions in each content area?
- Remedial teaching?
- Continuing, diagnostic and final evaluation of learners?
- Liaison with learners' colleagues and employers?
- Orientation of external resource people?
- Monitoring of the course?
- Staff development?
- Public relations?
- Organization and management of field trips?
- Ongoing fund-raising?
- Reporting to donors, liaising with others etc?
- Other aspects which need to be considered:
- Do the people concerned know exactly what is expected of them? Are they willing to do it? Are they trained to do it? If not, what is being done to prepare them? Is this adequate?
- Have you made rational decisions about how many learners you can accept in each intake, and with what previous educational experience and learning abilities? In making your decision, have you considered the number of full-time staff available, their commitment and their existing skills?

When do you intend to offer the course?

- Has a definite starting date been advertised? If so, will you be ready to offer a worthwhile course by then? If there is a query about whether you will be ready on time or not, would it do you more harm to start a few months later than planned and be well prepared, or to start on time and offer a weak course? Why?

Other issues which may have come to mind in reading this:....

Did you find some of these questions relevant and worthy of critical consideration? Or did you tend to justify what you currently do without much critical thought? In the next sub-sections, we focus on particular aspects of curriculum analysis in more detail.

Curriculum Content Analysis: What Should Be Learned?

Deciding what should be learned is obviously very closely related to the question of why some content is included and other excluded, and is discussed more fully in Chapters 3 and 4. In the earlier sections about role, sector and socio-economic-political analysis we have also addressed this indirectly. Here, we just make the point that learners can play a major part in planning curriculum content.

Have you ever helped a group of learners to specify their own objectives for their course? If not, how do you feel about the idea in principle? Why? (See Chapter 5 for fuller discussion.)

Learners can not only decide on the content to be learned, they can also choose appropriate learning venues and skilled resource people to co-ordinate each section of the course, and allocate time for achieving each objective. These related decisions about venues, facilitators and time allocation are also part of the curriculum-planning process, and can be shared with learners much more frequently than is usually done.

Resource Analysis: What Learning Resources Should Be Used?

We find it useful to think of three different kinds of resources in any educational situation: first, and most important, the learners themselves; second, the facilitators and other resource people (see next section); third, materials, equipment, venues and facilities.

Learners as resources

Many educators pay lip-service to learners being useful resources to themselves and each other, but don't structure opportunities for learners to share their experiences and insights. Many learners will not initially believe that they or their co-learners have anything useful to contribute. After years of passivity in conventional schooling, they assume that the only person worth listening to is 'the teacher'. One of our greatest challenges is to demystify the educator's role and help learners trust themselves and their peers as resources for learning. As we discussed in Chapter 1, building a co-operative learning climate is a crucial part of this process.

How can you help learners to value their own experience, and to stop viewing you as the 'expert'?

One technique we and several others with whom we have worked have found useful is described below. Other ideas about using co-learners and other social and occupational contacts as learning partners are discussed in Chapter 6.

'Years Of Experience'

We first saw this exercise used in a South African group where all the learners were black, female, nurses. One of the facilitators was a white, male, doctor. He was concerned that because of racial, gender and occupational differences, he would automatically be assumed to be the expert and that this would prevent others from contributing freely and from perceiving themselves and their colleagues as valuable resources for learning. He asked each participant to add up the number of years they had worked in a hospital or clinic, and also the number of years they had studied health care. As each person called out their figures, he wrote them in two columns on the board. He wrote down his own figures too. Finally, he added all the figures up. The group was stunned to see the total: what a lot of experience we have between us! He also emphasized that his figures were lower than most of theirs. He ended by saying that he would be relying on members of the group to help him make the learning sessions as beneficial as possible. This exercise had a major impact on the group and on relationships between the learners and educators. We have since used it with similar powerful effects in several other learning groups.

Other available resources

Other resources we analyse as part of our curriculum analysis include the learning venue (layout of the room, lighting, ventilation, desk and storage space), educational equipment (boards, projectors, stationery), library facilities, community-based facilities, transport, telephones, secretarial support, photocopying services, eating arrangements, and residential accommodation. (Alternative locations for learning are considered separately below.) As we discussed in the section about the physical learning climate in Chapter 1, learners must feel respected and taken seriously in all these matters.

Can you think of other resources to analyse as part of a larger situation analysis?

Resource People Analysis: Who Should Facilitate Learning?

We are using the term 'resource people' to refer to facilitators, guest speakers, community-based contacts, project supervisors and other people you as a co-ordinator invite to assist with a course or educational event.

What characteristics of resource people are important for you to analyse before you invite their participation?

At the most basic level, we consider demographic characteristics like the age, gender and race of potential resource people. (Are we reproducing sexist stereotypes by involving mainly men, for example?) We also find it useful to consider their practical skills (including their educational and communication skills). Because some people give weak formal presentations does not mean that they are excluded: either we work with them to develop their skills (or confidence), or we structure appropriate situations for them to use their existing skills. For example, they may work well with a small group of learners pursuing an optional project; or they may be excellent role models during community visits. Finally, we consider their life experiences, their educational philosophies, their commitment to the broad goals of the course in question, and their political ideologies.

Do you think it is best to expose participants to resource people who hold a broad range of ideologies, or only to those who hold similar ideas to yours? Why?

If you are working in a situation where many resource people assist, you may find the reflections below useful.

Building A Common Vision And Group Identity Among Resource People

In 1987, we co-ordinated a trainer-training programme for educators associated with the new course at Ubuntu Social Development Institute (USDI) in South Africa. After analysing the situation and doing informal interviews with the directors and potential participants, we identified several objectives for our work with the group. Most of these related to helping people develop their educational skills, but it also seemed important to build a feeling of commitment to USDI as a new and vulnerable alternative institution in the oppressive South African context. Also, we became aware of significant ideological differences within the group. We wanted the participants concerned to acknowledge these differences while still seeing their roles as mutually supportive.

We began the series of workshops with climate-building exercises (see Chapter 1). (We did not assume that because participants all worked together in the same organization they necessarily trusted and respected each other.) Then, we facilitated a session in which people worked in small groups and analysed the situation they felt themselves to be in. Participants were unusually frank in the follow-up discussion as they aired their frustrations, fears and hopes. The 'USDI Manifesto' quoted earlier in the section about socio-economic-political analysis emerged from this session. In the process of analysing the situation in the way they did, participants came to see USDI as an innovation well worth investing in and protecting, and the strong bonds holding people together in opposition to apartheid and exploitation were emphasized.

How could you help resource people develop a sense of common purpose and commitment in your situation?

Learning Group Analysis: Who Should Learn?

In discussing the educational resources we need to analyse, we made a general point about viewing learners themselves as a major resource in any learning group. That principle applies equally from year to year or from course to course. However, the specific composition of each learning group varies considerably. No two groups are alike, and each demands flexibility and sensitivity from us as educators if the individual and collective potentials of participants are to be realized. What specific characteristics of the learning group should you consider?

Mankuba Ramalepe, an educator working with women's groups and village health workers in South Africa, uses the following sub-headings to structure her analyses of the learning groups with whom she works.

Issues To Analyse In A Learning Group: Mankuba Ramalepe's Ideas

- Geographical areas of origin
- Size of the learning group
- Gender composition of the group
- Ethnic composition of the group
- Age of group members
- Educational level
- Economic status of members

- Prior knowledge and past experience of members
- Problems as perceived by the group
- The feelings of the group
- My own observations and feelings about the group.

Which of these issues are relevant in your particular situation? Did you think of additional issues to analyse?

Educators can have a major influence on the kinds of learning groups with whom they work. Some refuse to get involved with 'student selection', saying that they don't want to 'play God' – they simply teach whoever comes through the door. However, this ignores the fact that certain social groups are systematically denied access to the door. If you feel that the wrong people (eg only urban-dwellers, or only middle-class learners) are being educated in your institution, then you need to lobby for change. Changing the composition of your learning groups may have a greater long-term impact than any other curriculum innovations you introduce.

Mankuba's point about the feelings of group members is particularly important. In Chapter 1 we mentioned the expectations and fears that learners bring to a situation, affecting their ability to relax and learn. These issues cannot be glossed over: we must deal with them openly – even if only to inform learners that we will not be conforming to their expectations of us, as we describe below.

Dealing With Unrealistic Learner Expectations

We were facilitating a climate-building workshop at the start of a year-long course for primary healthcare nurses who had conventional school and nursing college backgrounds. They were used to being subservient, passive and uncritical as learners. We intended to use adult education approaches throughout the course; to have learners participate in planning and managing their own curriculum; to use the experience of each person as a learning resource. In short, their expectations and ours were completely incompatible.

So how should we begin? Knowing that they would expect us to take control, we began the first session in a fairly didactic way, saying that this was not a conventional course, and that we were not like most teachers they had known. We would be expecting them to participate much more actively, to take control of their own learning, and to share responsibility for the course with us. We gave some formal input about adult education as a discipline and about other programmes where these principles had been successfully applied. Then, without further concession to conventional practice, we began with some of the climate-building exercises discussed in Chapter 1. By the end of the first week, we were all – participants and facilitators – exhausted but exhilarated. Was it possible for a 'classroom' with 'nursing students' and their 'trainers' to be so radically transformed into an open, challenging learning group so quickly? It was hard to believe.

In subsequent years, we needed the initial didactic session less and less. Why? Most new applicants had spoken to previous graduates of the course who had prepared them for a completely different learning experience. In other words, learners were now entering the course with more appropriate expectations.

We conclude this sub-section with some reflections by Janet Giddy, a South African PHC educator.

The Need To Analyse Learning Groups: Janet Giddy's Reflections

(Janet had tried to initiate a discussion in a group of clinic nurses who had met for a one-day in-service training session.)

The discussion dragged and there was little spontaneity. When I asked for feedback about what had been discussed in small groups, there was usually a deafening silence. In the end, we resorted to going around the circle either clockwise or anti-clockwise in a rather formal, stiff way. Possible reasons I thought of for the failure of the discussion include:

- Group members were from different hospitals and clinics, did not know each other and may have been shy. Although we had started the day with a group introduction, it could hardly be classified as a great ice-breaker. There is definite value in a good initial ice-breaker.
- Most people probably expected a standard lecture.
- My attitude: did I not set them at ease? Was I patronizing? Also, I probably had unrealistic expectations of participation in a group meeting for a few hours only and not knowing each other well.
- The size of the group may have been too big for people to feel at ease. (List continues.)

Location and Venue Analysis: Where Should Learning Occur?

We briefly mentioned the issue of learning venues and locations when we considered educational resources. We include it as a separate heading here because we have often been surprised by the effect the learning venue and location of learning has on our work.

Reflections About The Locations Where Learning Occurs

When working with South African medical students at the urban medical school, a certain formality and distance between ourselves and the learners seemed appropriate. The learners and everyone else in the system expected this, and it felt most comfortable to us. However, when learners came into rural areas with us – usually for a one-week visit to a hospital and the community served by it – this changed. We all relaxed: casual clothes, no stethoscopes! We shared unfamiliar meals and accommodation; sweated in the extreme heat; tramped through dusty villages.

Many people felt a growing sense of outrage at the injustice, and shame at their own collusion in maintaining the existing political system. Far from home and all its constraints, these physical, social and psychological conditions combined to make all of us more open to our feelings and to each other. We were more willing to take risks. We were, simply, more 'real'.

As facilitators, we suggested learning activities we would never have introduced at the medical school. Gathered under a tree at the end of a long day,

> we'd ask students to use mimes or role plays to reflect on what they had learned. We frankly answered personal questions about our work and our vision for the future which no one would have asked in the city. We asked people what had made the greatest emotional impact on them – yes, it's okay for aspiring medics to have feelings! What different experiences those were. Very special. And the feedback from learners showed that it was not just we who were deeply affected by them.

Don't assume, however, that a different location will automatically 'unfreeze' people. We are still products of our socialization, and some learners may feel more threatened than usual being out of a familiar environment. We need to go gently. Merely moving a group to a new location cannot in any way substitute for the intentional climate-building we described in Chapter 1. However, if that is not feasible because you will only be with the group for a very short time, you may find that a different location at least opens them to ideas and processes you would not have introduced otherwise.

In this section we have tried to clarify what we mean by situation analysis. Analysing and re-analysing the situation (as things change and as our own insights deepen) is something we all need to do constantly; the job is never finished. And responding creatively to the situations we're in is, of course, an even greater challenge. Clearly, critical situation analysis is a major task given all the different aspects of the situation we need to consider. If this section has seemed overwhelmingly long or complex, please take our earlier suggestion and start small, with an aspect which particularly interests you. Before long, you may find yourself a habitual analyser.

Periodic Review And Issues To Consider

1. We have suggested that four major aspects of the situation need analysing: roles, sectors, the socio-economic-political context, and the curriculum (defined in its broad sense). Can you think of any other aspects to add?
2. Which aspects of the situation do you personally feel you need to focus on in more detail? Why? Which are most important for your colleagues and the learners with whom you work to consider?
3. Which strategies we mentioned or you added would you personally like to use in your efforts to improve your situation analyses?
4. Which strategies to encourage critical analysis might your colleagues find most useful? Why?
5. Which strategies would learners find most useful? Why?
6. Are the strategies you have listed likely to help you and others avoid the potential problems of superficial and uncritical analyses?
7. Which strategies could do 'double duty' at the start of a workshop or course to help with climate-building (see Chapter 1) as well as situation analysis?

Practical Exercises

You may want to complete some or all of these, and/or other exercises you have thought of which seem more relevant in your situation.

1. In the periodic review above, we asked which aspects of the situation you personally need to focus on most and which strategies would help you most. Now, use those strategies (with colleagues, friends or learners as appropriate) to help deepen your analysis.
2. In order to locate your work in a particular sector in a broader context, either 'draw' a situation analysis, or if you prefer using words, draft a summary statement like the USDI staff did in part 3 of their 'Manifesto' (quoted in the section about socio-economic-political analysis).
3. Assume that you are facilitating a workshop or short course and don't have the time you'd ideally like for extensive climate-building exercises and then a detailed situation analysis phase with participants. Draft a timetable for the opening hours/days which will include exercises, codes and/or techniques which will 'do double duty' or at least build logically on each other to achieve both these objectives. Ask some colleagues for feedback on the timetable, and then make any changes you feel are necessary.
4. Design a code (eg a story, role play, picture) which can be used as a discussion-starter with learners about a topic you want them to critically analyse. Then, ask some colleagues to participate in a practice session in which you use the 'But why?' method (see the socio-economic-political analysis section) to dig deeper into the root causes of problems. Ask for specific feedback about how you can improve your facilitation (eg was the code clear and appropriate; should you write notes on a board; or ask a volunteer in the group to keep a list of 'side questions' which should be returned to after the main discussion is over?). When you feel ready, use the code (revised if necessary) and 'But why' technique with a learning group.
5. We discussed 'naming' or labelling a phenomenon versus using unnecessary jargon. Review some of the handouts, lecture notes and other educational materials you use, and make two lists: one for words which represent concepts which you feel are essential for learners to understand; and one for words which constitute unnecessary jargon and could be eliminated. Next, ensure that the words in your first list are in fact clearly and fully explained in a way that learners can understand and remember. Finally, edit and re-draft your materials.
6. The technique of 'sculpturing' may be new to you. If so, think of how you might use it to help learners analyse an issue of concern to them. Ask some friends or colleagues to participate in a practice session and get their feedback first.

7. Plan the preparatory session before a community visit or field trip. What is the main objective of the visit? How can learners be involved in generating a list of issues to observe or questions to ask during the visit? Should different individuals or small groups be asked to report back on specific issues in the follow-up discussion? Should people be asked to write up some of their impressions before the final discussion (perhaps to avoid peer pressure and conformity to a dominant view)? Will learners need to practise any skills before the visit (eg how to interview community members tactfully)?

Conclusion

The sheer length of this chapter indicates that analysing our situations critically is a complex task. It also shows the central role we believe situation analysis and conscientization must play in progressive educational work. As we have emphasized throughout, we as educators must analyse our situations to ensure that our work promotes social justice and change rather than passively supporting the status quo. Once that is done, we owe it to the learners with whom we work to encourage them to analyse their situations in turn. They will then be in a position to make conscious choices about their own work and more immediately, about the learning they need to do now. How learners can be helped to make detailed educational decisions for themselves is discussed in the next chapter and the rest of the book.

You may want to return to the self-assessment exercises spread throughout this chapter and re-assess yourself (using the second columns) now that you have worked through the sections you felt were relevant. If you decide to read more about this topic, some of the resources referred to throughout this chapter may be of use. You could then use the third column in the self-assessment exercise to rate yourself after furthering your inquiry. On the other hand, if you feel ready to move on, Chapter 3 awaits.

Once learners have critically analysed their situations in a learning climate of mutual trust, respect and co-operation, they can start thinking about what specific things they need to learn during their course in order to practise effectively once it is over. We have found a competency-based approach (combined with diagnostic self-assessment and contract learning – see Chapters 4 & 5) most focused and motivating, as we explain in the next chapter.

Chapter 3

Generating A Competency Profile

A competency-based approach offers ... the chance to build [curricula] on a practice-related model designed to improve performance. Such an opportunity should not be lightly dismissed. (Dunn et al, 1985:23)

Chapter Preview

Imagine how different your career as a learner would have been if every course you did helped you gain – at your own pace – specific, openly stated competencies (knowledge, attitudes and skills) you needed at that particular point in your development. No irrelevancies. No repetition of material you have previously learned. No sense of being rushed here, or held back there. No second-guessing what you'd be tested on in an examination. These are some of the advantages (we discuss disadvantages later) of competency-based education (CBE). Heady stuff. But wait – there's more. We propose a combination of CBE with a critical self-directed learning (SDL) approach in which you as a learner are actively involved in defining the competencies you need to master, and then in deciding how you will master them, and how you'll evaluate your progress.

In the previous chapter we discussed helping learners to analyse their situations. A key question they should ask as part of their situation analysis is: what skills, knowledge, and attitudes do I need in order to function competently in my work, both now and in future? In asking this question, they enter the third phase of the critical SDL process: generating a competency profile or list of competencies needed to function effectively. It is this step we examine in this chapter. After this, learners are ready for the fourth step: diagnostic self-assessment of their existing competencies and identification of specific learning needs as we discuss in Chapter 4.

The main questions we ask in this chapter are:

- What is competency-based education (CBE)?
- What is a competency profile?
- What are the advantages and potential problems of a CBE approach?
- How can a competency profile best be generated?
- Why should learners be included in the process of generating competencies and how might this be achieved?

Self-Assessment

This self-assessment exercise enables you to assess your strengths and weaknesses concerning competency-based approaches. You can then decide which, if any, sections of this chapter to read. The first column is to rate yourself before you work through (sections of) this chapter. The second column can be used to re-assess yourself after your reading, to assess the extent of your learning. The third column is for you to return to at a later stage if you decide to further your inquiry, perhaps using some of the resources we suggest throughout the chapter. Please use a scale of 1-5 where 1 indicates that you feel very unsure of an issue, and 5 indicates that you feel very confident.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

• explain the differences between competency-based and other curriculum models			
• explain what a competency profile is			
• discuss the rationale for and limitations of competency-based educational approaches			
• structure opportunities for learners to do so too			
• use some or all of the following techniques to generate a competency profile:			
- literature review			
- record reviews			
- verbal reports of practitioners			
- observational techniques			
- personal reflection			
- discussions with learners			
• justify my decision to include learners in this aspect of the curriculum design process			
• structure opportunities for learners to contribute ideas for inclusion in the competency profile			
• ask learners to identify the competencies which are 'core' for their situations so that those can be given priority during their studies			
My additional ideas about generating a competency profile:			
Total:			

Overview: Competency-Based Education (CBE) And Competency Profiles

How Are Most Curricula Organized?

How was the curriculum usually organized when you think about some of the formal educational experiences you have had (at schools, colleges or universities)? Was the teaching and learning organized around specific problems (such as social, health, or educational problems)? Were you provided with a list of objectives that you should achieve by the end of the course? Were you helped to define and then develop specific competencies you would need in order to function effectively after the course? Or were you perhaps exposed to different subjects to be passed in examinations?

Many recognize the last-mentioned, called a subject-centred curriculum model, as the most familiar. At school, we 'did' arithmetic, history and various other subjects, and at college or university, we 'did' anatomy, sociology, philosophy and so on. If we passed enough examinations, we matriculated, graduated, or qualified. We were then assumed to be able to function as citizens, nurses, teachers, community workers, engineers, builders and so on. *(McGaghie et al, 1978:13-15; Zais, 1976:397-408)*

Given that so much educational work is organized in this subject-centred way, there must be some good reasons for it. Can you think of some?

Perhaps the major reason is the ease of administering this system. A history teacher is hired. Specific periods or sessions are allocated on the timetable for history lessons. A history textbook is prescribed. A history exam is set and marked. And any students who are not kept busy with history can simply substitute geography (or some other subject). In this way, all the teachers and all the students can be fairly simply controlled.

Did you think of other advantages? Now, can you think of any disadvantages of a subject-centred system?

Most disadvantages of the subject-centred curriculum model can be overcome when a competency-based curriculum model is used. You can add to your list of disadvantages if any new ideas emerge as you read the sections below.

What Is Competency-Based Education (CBE)?

Knowing what a 'subject-centred curriculum' is, what do you understand by a 'competency-based curriculum'?

Competency-based education (CBE) is a learner-centred model which arranges learning and teaching around the actual competencies a practitioner needs to function effectively in the real world. It is an individualized approach which takes account of the differing prior experiences and preferred learning styles of students. *(Beare, 1985:75; Cross, 1975; Kelly, 1977:10; Nagel & Richman, 1972; Pochyly, 1973:18; WHO Technical Report No.547, 1974:15; Zais, 1976:408-13)*

The focus in CBE as it is usually implemented is on self-paced mastery of pre-defined competencies:

> Most students (perhaps more than 90 per cent) can master what we have to teach them.... (Bloom et al, 1981:51)

We prefer to say that most learners can master what they need to learn. Indeed, our major concern with CBE as it is usually applied is the dependent, unquestioning position occupied by learners. In critical SDL, it is essential to change this – to turn the process of defining competencies into a collaborative exercise fully involving learners, as we discuss later. In any event, CBE proponents claim that with diagnostic feedback and remediation, most learners can indeed master what they need to learn, and can become competent. (For a counter-argument, see Slavin, 1987.) *(Anderson & Burns, 1987; Black & Broadfoot, 1982:44; Block, 1971; Bloom et al, 1981; Guskey, 1987)*

CBE differs from the increasingly popular problem-centred designs which try to integrate learning and teaching from several disciplines by focusing on particular problems (such as social problems, patient-management problems), but do not necessarily specify the competencies required to deal with these problems. *(Boud, 1988a:27-8; Leigh & Reiser, 1986; Maddison, 1980; Newble & Clarke, 1986; Zais, 1976:413-29)*

A competency-based approach, although it may subsequently incorporate behavioural-objectives, is also different from a behavioural objectives curriculum model in that it is not rigidly pre-planned, the desired educational outcomes are clearly linked to competencies needed to function in the real world, and it ensures that all learners leave the programme having mastered the necessary competencies, regardless of how they entered or how long it takes them to complete the programme. *(Boyer, 1975; Nagel & Richman, 1972; Willingham, 1977:231)*

Was your definition at the start of this section adequate, or do you want to revise it now?

What Is A Competency Profile? Some Extracts

A competency profile is a detailed list of competencies (which include knowledge, attitudes and skills) a 'competent' practitioner requires. The self-assessment exercises at the start of each chapter in this book are extracted from a detailed competency profile we designed for co-ordinators of self-directed learning. (As we explain in Chapter 4, a self-assessment instrument is simply a competency profile with space for self-ratings.) The extracts below are from competency profiles designed by educators we know and learners with whom they work.

Competency profile for community workers

The Ubuntu Social Development Institute (USDI) is a new South African venture to help community workers develop appropriate competencies. What we found particularly interesting about the competency profile developed by the participants and staff during the first course in 1987 was the separation of knowledge and skills into sub-sections within each major field of study. The extract below is from the first sub-section of the competency profile; a total of nine were included in the form.

Competencies For Community Workers Defined By Griffiths Zabala, Ivan Samdaan And Participants At The Ubuntu Social Development Institute

(Participants were asked to rate their knowledge and skills on a scale of 0-5.)

Adult Education Competencies

- Knowledge:
  - Philosophy of adult education
  - Principles of adult education
  - Scope of adult education (list continues)
- Skills:
  - Perform a situation analysis
  - Set learning objectives
  - Facilitate adult learning events
  - Use appropriate learning aids
  - Create a conducive learning environment
  - Evaluate learning processes
  - (List continues.)

Competencies for paediatric primary health care

Gcina Radebe is a nurse and educator in South Africa. She and her colleagues developed a list of competencies which primary healthcare nurses could use to assess their learning needs in paediatrics. A brief extract follows.

Self-assessment Form For Paediatrics Developed By Gcina Radebe And Colleagues

(Learners were asked to use a three-point rating scale.)

I know how to:

- establish rapport with a patient
- take a full paediatric history
- handle a neonate
- refer a patient from a clinic to hospital

(List continues.)

These extracts from competency profiles may stimulate you to consider using a competency-based approach in your work. If so, you may want to consider the rationale for and potential problems of this approach (see below), and alternative methods of generating competency profiles (see later in this chapter).

Why Use A Competency-Based Approach?

What are the potential advantages of a CBE approach? In considering this, it may help to think of a subject-centred course you have done, then imagine if it had been competency-based instead. What would have been the benefits?

CBE ensures rational and relevant curricula

CBE provides a rational basis for curriculum development. Programmes are more relevant when competencies needed by graduates have been defined. CBE ensures that educators analyse the situation (see Chapter 2) in detail before they offer a course. This prevents the problems of 'transplanting' curricula; for example from First World medical schools to Third World ones:

> ... the definition of medical competence is bound to local political, economic, and social circumstances.... The 'good physician' in one setting may be totally incompetent in another. (McGaghie et al, 1978:23)

Another advantage is that with self-pacing and elimination of re-learning of existing competencies, CBE is quicker and therefore more cost-effective *(del Bueno & Altano, 1984:49)*. CBE also serves the public interest because it emphasizes mastery of relevant and important competencies, rather than 'doing time' in certain compulsory courses and then passing an examination which may or may not be valid (see Chapter 8).

There are no 'secrets' with CBE

In CBE, the required competencies are clearly expressed; learners do not have to continually 'second-guess' what they may be tested on. The control which conventional educators have over their students is thus somewhat decreased and the goals of programmes can be made explicit for all to debate.

CBE complements a self-directed learning (SDL) approach

Most CBE takes place within teacher-directed institutions but it has great potential when used in conjunction with SDL. Indeed, without CBE, self-directed work can become overwhelmingly complex or even 'un-directed' for some learners.

Learners are not the only ones to benefit when CBE and SDL are combined. As co-ordinators, we found the competency profile to be a source of considerable security as we made the transition from teacher-directed to self-directed learning. For example, when sceptical colleagues accused us of failing to 'give adequate direction' to learners, we pointed to the competency profile and said that was their guide. And when we had to keep track of the individual progress of learners, the competency profile again was crucial (see Chapter 8). Finally, we find that a competency-based approach helps self-directed learners become more effective at reflection and self-evaluation (see Chapters 7 and 8).

Which of these rationales apply equally to other curriculum models? Did you think of other ideas to add to this list?

Problems To Avoid

Before reading our ideas, you may want to generate your own list of problems which might emerge if you use CBE.

Education for conformity or for change?

CBE may, in some applications, be an inherently conservative approach. First, the underlying assumption is that competencies should be pre-defined and the learner's task is to passively, uncritically, master them. In Freire's (1970b:8) terms, the learner is an object of education, not its subject. Second, with CBE, learners theoretically learn what they will need to 'function effectively' after their course. The question is: under what circumstances? If the answer is 'under existing circumstances', then CBE may merely support the status quo rather than promote critical thought and social change. The prior step of critical situation analysis (see Chapter 2) is essential to prevent such conservatism. *(Griffin, 1983:22; Kelly, 1977:51-64; Rogers, 1983:306; Zais, 1976:344-5)*

This potential problem of conservatism is not unique to CBE, of course. The content included in any curriculum could be potentially conservative. There are no objective criteria to use in selecting curriculum content. The values, beliefs, ideologies and prejudices of individuals are always involved in curriculum design, which makes it an inherently subjective and inescapably political activity. We as educators have to face this reality. Some educators act as though curriculum design is a neutral activity, denying its political and subjective nature. They support the status quo by default. Others, working for change, acknowledge the politics and subjectivity of curriculum design, and use social needs, human rights, justice, and democracy as their guides.

Education for the present or the future?

> If you are hoping to produce a new type of [practitioner] who will practise in the future, in circumstances you do not yet know, there is no appropriate role model in practice yet. You run the risk of designing an astronaut's training by observing a tram driver. (Simpson, 1980:230)

This statement is true and disturbing, but also exaggerated. The gap between training and application is not usually so great. In any event, we have to start somewhere, and basing current programmes on the competencies that will be required to practise now and in the foreseeable future seems a reasonable approach. Moreover, as we discuss below, several other strategies for defining competencies can complement observations of current practitioners.

Is CBE too restrictive or too technical?

Educators and learners who value the unplanned discoveries made during undirected study may argue that the clear focus of CBE is too restrictive. (While this is a potential limitation, the opposite danger of learners 'getting lost' in unfocused, undirected work is also great.) Much depends on how the competency profile is viewed by both learners and facilitators. Is it a rigid, limiting structure, or a flexible framework to guide learners? Competency profiles can be changed as we use them. This flexible use of competency profiles is much more likely if learners themselves help to generate the profile (see later in this chapter).

Some critics fear that CBE may become unduly 'technical', because certain proponents have overemphasized skills over knowledge and attitude development. The result can be technically competent but uncritical or insensitive practitioners. (Beder, 1987:112; Gramsci in Entwistle, 1979:132; Rogers, 1983:142; Seager, 1984)

CBE has major administrative implications

CBE is difficult to administer: one has to keep track of students working at their own pace, with no formal cut-off point to their studies. This is no problem when learners do informal independent study or non-accredited continuing education programmes, but the prospects of administering and accounting for accredited CBE on a large scale are daunting, even for enthusiasts.

Where the length of the course is pre-set by educational authorities or unchangeable institutional rules, a compromise is to let learners decide how to organize and pace their learning within the pre-determined period. Those who achieve mastery sooner can pursue optional aspects. This avoids the problem of having some learners rushed and others held back by the average pace of the group.

Competency items may be too vaguely phrased or too detailed

Competency items must be specific to be useful as learning guides and evaluation criteria. Some educators (see Arnold, Willoughby & Calkins, 1985; Robinson, 1962; and Sclabassi & Woelfel, 1984, for example) use phrasing so vague it is virtually meaningless.

At the other extreme, learners and facilitators may want to generate a complete list of all possible competencies. In the end, everyone may feel too overwhelmed by the detail of the profile to begin mastering the competencies. Perhaps the concept of individuals specifying 'core competencies' (see later) would avoid this while reassuring them that their list is comprehensive. Here are some reflections by Det Prozesky, a South African educator working with community health workers:

> **'Solid' Versus 'Incidental' Competencies: Reflections By Det Prozesky**
>
> We found a practical problem when generating competencies in a group. The list emerges with two types of competency (although there is a grey area in between). You could call them 'solid competencies' (really central, related to proper functioning on a daily basis; eg 'Can conduct a patient-centred interview') and 'incidental competencies' (dealing with small areas or situations which may occasionally arise, special cases; eg 'Can manage a case of Congo fever'). The group must differentiate between them and decide what to do with each type – perhaps subsuming incidental ones under solid ones, or dealing with them last if there is time. Too many incidental ones will overwhelm everyone.

How can a competency profile be generated?

The final potential problem of a CBE approach we have identified is: how can a comprehensive competency profile – one which avoids being conservative, controlling, restrictive or narrowly technical – be generated? We answer this in a separate section below.

Did you think of other potential problems to add? Before moving on to consider strategies for generating competencies, you may want to complete this periodic review.

Periodic Review

1. How would you describe the major features of a competency-based approach to a colleague?
2. What do you see as the most important advantages and disadvantages of a competency-based educational approach?
3. In your opinion, can the disadvantages of CBE be overcome so that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages? Specifically, do you think learners could be included in such a way that 'their own voice' is heard when competencies are being defined, rather than having them be dictated to, passively accepting what educators prescribe as important competencies?
4. List the major disadvantages of the curriculum model you currently use, and then mark off which of these could be overcome if a competency-based approach were used instead.
5. What aspects of your work are amenable to a CBE approach? Could the course you offer be effective using a CBE design? Why/not?
6. If you wanted to experiment with CBE in your own work, who would you need to convince first; how would you try to do so; and what specific arguments would you put forward?

How Can A Competency Profile Be Generated?

Specifying competencies – including crucial ones and excluding less important ones – is a major task for anyone contemplating CBE. For educators using CBE together with SDL, it is perhaps even more important. So, what methods could you use to generate a competency profile?

Prior Preparation By Educators

Reviewing the literature

Reviewing current textbooks and journals in your field of practice can help generate competency items. In some cases, published competency lists are available to be adapted.

Record reviews

Depending on your field, record reviews may suggest competencies to include in a profile. For example, if you work in health care, you could review local morbidity and mortality statistics and various medical records (see McGaghie et al, 1978).

When we were generating competencies for adult educators, we got ideas from teaching-evaluation forms used at various institutions. However, the educational philosophies of the people who had compiled the forms were clearly evident in what they included in and excluded from their evaluation forms. For example, in some colleges, educators are evaluated on items like 'effectively controls the class' or 'disciplines students effectively'. Before including competency items, we first considered whether our educational philosophies would be reinforced or contradicted by the items included in these forms. We did not include some competency items because they were not consistent with our own educational philosophy and with the stated goals of the course we were co-ordinating. As we've said, no education is neutral.

Verbal (oral and written) reports

Interviews with practitioners and recent graduates can be useful for generating competency items. We use both individual and group interviews. *(Knowles, 1975:82-4; 1980:228; 1986:28; Ulmer, 1981:53-4)* Hearing about 'critical incidents' which indicate either excellent or incompetent practice are also recommended. *(Abbatt, 1980; Dunn et al, 1985; McGaghie et al, 1978)* The Delphi technique involves gathering ideas from practitioners and then trying to get them to reach agreement. It has been used to generate competencies in disciplines ranging from medical specialties to adult education and self-directed learning. *(Burg et al, 1976; Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986; Daniel & Rose, 1982; Dunn et al, 1985; Gaskins et al, 1987; McGaghie et al, 1978; Rossman & Bunning, 1978; Woolliscroft et al, 1985)*

Observational techniques

Direct observational techniques can also be used to identify competencies. For example, Bergman et al (1966) used time and motion studies of practising paediatricians. Stephenson (1981:150) advocates field visits, and several authors recommend job and task analysis. *(Abbatt, 1980:12-27; Dunn et al, 1985; Knowles, 1975:83; 1980:227; McGaghie et al, 1978; McGuire, 1983)*

Personal reflection

We have not seen personal reflection on one's own experience recommended in the literature as a useful way of generating competency items. Other educators must surely have used this as we have, but must either take it for granted as a method, or fear being accused of 'unscientific' or 'subjective' work. It is one of the most productive techniques we use.

Discussions With Learners

Apart from prior preparation by educators, another method of generating competencies is to ask the learners who have enrolled in a particular course what competencies they think they will need in order to function effectively after the course. Because there is relatively little in the literature about including learners in this way, and because it is essential to help learners break out of their traditionally silent role if a critical educational approach is used, we describe and reflect on our experience of this process in the next section. *(Knowles, 1975:82-4; 1980:228; 1986:28; Ulmer, 1981:53-4)*

Have you thought of other methods to generate competency items?

Involving Learners In Generating Competency Profiles

Why Involve Learners?

Generating competencies in a learning group takes time, and some learners may get frustrated by the task. Given this, is it necessary to involve learners in this process? For us, the answer is yes, for two main reasons.

Learners should be central, not marginal

One of the main differences between self-directed learning (SDL) and teacher-directed learning (TDL) is that SDL specifically aims to re-locate educational power and control away from the teacher. Learners should exercise much greater control over their own learning. If this is accepted, then it is philosophically consistent to involve learners in generating the initial competency profile which will guide the process of SDL from there on. Moreover, in critical SDL we are committed to helping learners find and use their own voice (Freire 1970b:7) so they can then act on the world to change it. (Griffin [1987] makes a similar point in the context of asking adult learners to 'name their own learning processes'). If we prescribe competencies for them, we are just like the teachers whom Freire (1970b:6-12) criticizes for alienating learners by choosing which words will be used as generative words in literacy education. We would effectively limit the range of possibilities, keep learners passive, dependent, and marginalized.

Several participants in formal courses and workshops we have conducted have said that they appreciate seeing their own words, their specific phrasing of items, in the final draft of the competency profile. They seem to feel affirmed as active participants and better motivated to master competencies they themselves have identified. However, as we have explained, it is primarily to share control with learners – not merely to motivate them to study harder – that we advocate learner involvement in this process. If they are to use their learning to act on the world (and use their actions in and on the world to learn), who are we to define for them what should be learned?

Reflections On A Dilemma: What Would You Have Done?

While we have tried to 'use the words' of participants wherever possible, we have not done so in all cases. For example, in one group of adult educators, the following competency was suggested: 'Be patient and understanding with stupid learners'. While the sentiment was admirable, labelling a learner as 'stupid' was unacceptable to some participants and to us. After discussion it was rephrased: 'Remain patient and understanding with learners who have learning difficulties'.

We do not apologize for influencing competency profiles in line with our educational philosophies. But we do think that all of us who co-ordinate SDL courses must become critically aware of our role in this phase of the course design, and make our ideological positions clear to the learners with whom we work. Learners also need a chance to scrutinize the near-final draft of the competency profile and to have suggestions for change considered by the group. As a last resort, if a learner cannot convince the group, s/he is free to make private adaptations to the 'official version' of the competency profile. For example, if someone insists on using the phrase 'stupid learners', they can include it in their personal copy of the profile.

Did we take control away from the learner who used the word 'stupid'? To some extent, yes. However, we believe that education is a two-way process, and educators need not suspend judgement and critical thought or sacrifice their own philosophies in pursuit of some pure form of learner control. What do you think? (See Boud, 1981b:28, 1987:231; Brookfield, 1986:20-4; Dewey, 1938:33, 84-5; Heron, 1988:78-9; Hodgson & Reynolds, 1987:157; Mezirow, 1990c:357-8; Potts, 1988:148-9; Powell, 1988:118.)

It comes back to the issue of ideology and curriculum design discussed earlier in this chapter. Curriculum design is an inherently political activity; in a self-directed course, the process of generating a competency profile is a crucial step in the curriculum design process. So it too is an inherently political activity in which the learners and the course co-ordinators both have essential roles to play.

It helps learners develop an understanding of SDL

The process of self-directed learning will initially be strange to learners, and they need help to understand the rationale and process as soon as possible. Regardless of how much explanation is given, learners cannot grasp the elements of a totally foreign process. They can only be reassured and supported as they work through the strangeness of it. Having experienced it, they will understand it.

Even a technical process like this one of generating competencies may be slightly threatening initially. Learners may resist or even rebel against it if they have not first understood the rationale for their participation. We try to demystify the whole process of curriculum design in self-directed learning before asking learners to generate specific competencies.

What would be the best way of helping learners to understand the steps in curriculum design?

The quickest way is to tell learners. However, if you want your practice to be philosophically consistent, you will want learners to discover these steps for themselves. Of course, this takes much more time than telling. In our experience, about three to six hours of individual, small group, and plenary work is required for learners to generate and order the necessary steps, and to reach consensus about terminology. (Two small groups may suggest the same basic step, but use different words to describe it, and so get stuck defending their phrasing.) The steps below were those generated and agreed upon by one learning group with whom we worked.

Steps In Curriculum Design For Self-Directed Learners

1. Analyse the situation
2. Compile a competency profile
3. Self-assessment of learning needs
4. Set objectives
5. Draft a learning agreement
6. Negotiate acceptance of my learning agreement with course convenors
7. Negotiate to change my learning agreement as I learn more.

From written evaluations, we found that learners appreciated being involved in deciding what steps in curriculum design would be followed. Having generated and ordered these steps, they understood where the step of generating competencies fitted, and were excited about contributing their ideas for that particular phase. The more actively learners participate in every phase of the self-directed process – including generation of the very steps in the process – the sooner they will understand and appreciate this new approach.

How Can Learners Generate Competencies?

How would you encourage learners to generate competencies for a competency profile? What methods would work best? What prior preparation might they need to take this unfamiliar process seriously? Here we describe the steps we have found useful.

Individual reflection

We worked with nurses and doctors who were part-time university students doing a Diploma in Primary Health Care Education. During pre-course visits and in pre-course correspondence, we had asked participants to reflect on the competencies they needed to function effectively as educators in their unique situations. We suggested that they ask more experienced educators for ideas as well, and that they bring their lists of competencies to the initial orientation block.

Brainstorming and categorizing

We allocated time during the orientation period to brainstorm and 'flesh out' the competencies needed by each of the 12 participants. These competencies were then categorized under main headings (eg 'teaching methods', 'evaluation'). This took about an hour.

Individual work

Each learner was then asked to choose one category which interested her/him, and to do further individual work (eg reflecting, interviewing others, scanning books or articles) to try to generate additional competencies. Three hours was allocated for this, and people had the evening to continue working if necessary.

Plenary discussion

Next day, all the ideas were pooled for discussion and decision about whether to include or exclude particular items. This final session lasted four hours. (Incidentally, all these competency-generating sessions were evaluated very positively by participants: mean ratings were 4.7 and 4.8 on a five-point scale.)

Add previously generated competencies

Next, we got agreement from the group that the competencies they had generated should be combined with items we had previously generated in preparing for the course (using methods mentioned above like record reviews, interviews with practitioners and the like), so that the final draft of the competency profile would be as comprehensive as possible. Of course, if the learners themselves had been given additional time to review the literature, conduct interviews and so on, they could have generated these other competencies themselves. It is merely to save time that the co-ordinator need do this beforehand. (And we should add that our own inexperience with CBE and SDL initially made us so insecure that we felt reassured by doing detailed preparation beforehand! It gave us something of a 'teacher's role' to play in those early days before we were ready for the real transformation from teacher- to self-directed learning.)

Specification of 'core competencies'

As we said earlier, while a comprehensive competency profile may be reassuring, it may also be overwhelming.

Reflections On Comprehensive Competency Profiles And 'Core Competencies'

Once a comprehensive profile has been generated, each learner needs to specify the 'core competencies' which are essential for her/him to master by the end of the course. Because a well-researched competency profile is so detailed, it is impossible for everyone to become competent in all aspects. However, co-ordinators and learners need agreement about what each learner will master during the course. In other words, an absolute cut-off point is needed, and learners should agree that if they fail to master at least these 'core competencies', then they should not be considered competent practitioners, and should not graduate. In effect, then, we are suggesting that learners be the ones to specify the 'minimum requirements' for passing a course.

Of course, what is core for one learner may be very different for another who is working in a different situation or with different past experiences and interests.

When is the best time for learners to specify core competencies for themselves? Done too early in the course, learners may exclude certain competencies without really understanding their relevance or meaning; done too late, learners may become frustrated and feel overwhelmed by the comprehensiveness of the full profile.

Do you think learners can be trusted to specify their own 'core competencies'?

Some educators fear that learners may abuse the responsibility we give them, and try to 'get away with' as little work as possible. This may happen in a self-directed course, just as it does in conventional courses. But in our experience, the opposite problem – that of self-directed learners undertaking to do far too much – is much more serious (see Chapter 5).

Generally, self-directed learners can be relied upon to set their own minimum standards and core competencies, but we set one condition: someone else (a peer or facilitator) helps over-ambitious learners to cut back to a reasonable level. Although we have not found this necessary, you may want to add another condition: a lower limit is pre-specified (by peers, the co-ordinator, or an educational authority) to prevent potential abuse by learners.

When time is short

When time constraints don't allow the full process of learner participation described above, you might find the following adaptation useful.

A Short-Cut Approach

In one half-day workshop, we used individual reflection, brainstorming in small groups, and a final plenary session to generate competencies with participants. Time constraints made it impossible for them to do subsequent individual work on a particular section of the profile, so the group agreed to combine their initial list with other competencies we had previously generated (using other methods) to get a more detailed profile. The evaluations received were very positive: people felt that their contributions were taken seriously by ourselves and by other participants, and they appreciated having access to a comprehensive profile after such a short workshop.

Have you other ideas about strategies to include learners in generating competencies? If the idea of CBE is new to you, you may by now be feeling a bit confused about all the strategies for generating competencies and involving learners we have suggested. As often happens, we found that once we had made a start and actually put some initial ideas about competencies which seemed important in our situation down on paper, the process flowed smoothly and logically. So if you are at all attracted by the notion of CBE – adapted to ensure that learners are not limited by your perceptions of what competencies are important – don't hesitate. Reflect on your own situation (Chapter 2) and life experience first; then ask some colleagues for their ideas, scan the literature, interview practitioners and prospective participants. Before you know it, your initial list will be starting to look 'too comprehensive'.

Periodic Review And Issues To Consider

1. Which of the various methods for generating competencies discussed above or added by you would be most useful in your field of work and why?
2. The question is sometimes asked: 'Should facilitators have any input into competency profiles if learners are doing a self-directed course?' What do you think? We give our opinion below.

This question is usually asked by people who mistakenly assume that self-directed learners get no help or guidance from others. We believe that as co-ordinators of SDL, we are fully functioning members of the learning group, and we – like all other participants – have some unique insights to offer as resources to the group. We feel free to make contributions and suggestions which can be critically considered by others. Of course, our views must not dominate or stifle the group, and we ensure that others get their say, and have their ideas considered by the group too. We discuss controversial points (see the 'stupid learners' issue above) and seek consensus. Finally, we circulate a draft of the jointly compiled competency profile to learners, and make any changes requested by individuals and agreed upon by a majority of participants before the final draft is produced.

3. Some educators express interest in CBE, but feel they could never 'go so far' as to include learners in the process of generating competency items. They say their learners have insufficient prior knowledge of or previous exposure to the particular field of study; that it is 'unfair' to expect learners to do this; or that it is a 'waste of time' to put learners through a long process of discovery when the educators already know what is required. Are these reasonable conclusions, or do you think these educators are just looking for excuses to retain control? Once again, our ideas are included below.

There is no reason why many of the very steps we, as course co-ordinators, use to generate competencies could not also be used by learners. Prior knowledge of a field of study is not required to scan the literature, do record reviews, interview experienced practitioners and so on. Note that we do not pretend to learners that we have no 'content expertise', or that we all have 'equal knowledge' (see Candy, 1987:168-70; 1988). The point is not that we may know more than them initially. No, the point is that we specifically want learners to experience the process of generating competencies. Having done so once, they will never be intimidated when it becomes necessary again later in life. As previously mentioned, this does require a considerable investment of learners' time. However, if we deny them this experience, we may be condemning them to perpetual dependence on external authorities and 'experts', and drastically limiting their potential roles as change agents by pre-defining on their behalf what competencies they need to 'function effectively' in their situations.

4. What do you see as the major advantages and disadvantages for self-directed learners of using a competency-based approach?
5. Imagine yourself as co-ordinator of an accredited self-directed course. What would be the major advantages and disadvantages of adopting a competency-based approach?
6. Some disciplines – especially practical and technical ones – lend themselves easily to CBE approaches. How might an educator in a history, philosophy, sociology or other such department adapt and apply some of the ideas discussed here?

Practical Exercises

The following exercises may be useful if you want to adapt or apply competency-based approaches in your own work. Alternatively, you may have thought of other, more appropriate exercises for your particular situation.

1. Generate an initial list of the major headings for a competency profile in your field of work.
2. Now, reflect on your own experience to start 'fleshing out' one or more of the major categories with clearly phrased, detailed competencies. Next, use some other strategies we discussed or you added to develop this list and the initial list of headings further.
3. Prepare an outline for a session in which you introduce the concept of competency-based education to a learning group, and then ask them to help generate competency items for their course. (To be comprehensive, your outline should at least specify objectives, methods, aids, and time allocations.)

4. Ask a group of supportive colleagues to attend a 'run through' of the introductory session you have planned. They could play the roles of learners, raising realistic objections, asking appropriate questions, and showing varying degrees of fear, shock, rebellion, excitement and delight so that you can practise responding to these reactions.
5. You have been called to the principal (or Dean, Head of Department, President etc) to explain what you are planning to do with your revolutionary ideas about CBE and SDL. Are learners going to be left to 'run wild' with no supervision? Is the good name of this institution about to be ruined? Prepare some notes to reassure and convince her/him that your plan to use CBE and SDL is in fact superior to the approaches you used in the past.
6. See for yourself what learners can do about generating competencies, even in fields in which they have no prior experience. Think of a subject which interests you but about which you know nothing. Astronomy? Pharmacy? Electronics? Now, assume that you have been asked to generate competencies for that field. First, consider how you would go about it. Then, once you have a plan, follow it through, timing yourself for each phase and making a note of any insights or frustrations you can warn learners about in future. Once complete, perhaps your draft profile might persuade a colleague in the relevant field to adopt CBE as well! (The more support you have for an innovation within an institution, the more likely you are to succeed, as we discuss in Chapter 9.)

Conclusion

The focus in this chapter has been on defining the competencies practitioners will need to function in the real world after their formal studies. Although we have argued that CBE is a rational approach for both teacher- and self-directed courses, we have explained how and why learners themselves can be involved in generating competencies, and have argued that, used in conjunction with situation analysis (see Chapter 2), this is a crucial part of the critical self-directed learning process. Learners with whom we have worked have found the task of generating competencies to be a challenging and exciting one: it gives them a concrete overview of the learning they will be doing, and a sense of control over the process of defining limits (or lack of limits) for their learning. Having defined the competencies they need to function effectively in their particular contexts, the next step is for learners to assess their existing competencies and to identify their learning needs, using the competency profile as a guide. It is this process of diagnostic self-assessment that we deal with in the next chapter.

You may find it encouraging now to look back at the self-assessment exercise which opened this chapter, and to re-rate your existing competencies using the second column provided. Your ratings will probably be considerably higher in some areas, and where this is not the case, at least you will have a clear idea about what aspects need further work. We hope the resources referred to throughout this chapter will be useful as you continue your inquiry in this field.

Chapter 4

Diagnostic Self-Assessment Of Learning Needs

Diagnostic self-assessment is a wonderfully versatile process. In teacher-directed learning (TDL), it helps educators plan their teaching for maximum relevance and provides learners with a role in determining course content. In critical self-directed learning (SDL), it places learners firmly in control of deciding what they need to include in their individual, self-designed learning programmes. In both SDL and TDL, diagnostic self-assessment provides learners with an overview of material to be learned, and base-line data for subsequent re-assessment and measurement of learning and progress. With all these advantages then, why is diagnostic self-assessment so seldom used? Do educators simply not trust learners to assess themselves honestly?

Chapter Preview

As we saw in the previous chapter, the beauty of a competency-based educational (CBE) approach is that the competencies needed by practitioners are clearly defined and learning is individualized: learners are helped to master new competencies and spared the boredom and frustration of re-learning material they have previously mastered. Better yet, when CBE is used in conjunction with critical self-directed learning (SDL), learners themselves take control of every phase of the learning process – including this one of assessing existing competencies and determining individual learning needs. We call this the phase of diagnostic self-assessment of learning needs, and focus on it in this chapter. Then, in Chapter 5, we discuss how learners can be helped to draft learning agreements to meet the learning needs they have identified using the competency profile as their self-assessment instrument.

The major questions we address in this chapter are:

- What does diagnostic self-assessment entail?
- What are the reasons for and potential problems of using diagnostic self-assessment?
- How can learners be helped to assess their strengths and weaknesses realistically?

Self-Assessment

This is a self-assessment exercise about diagnostic self-assessment! If you start by assessing your learning needs in this area, you can plan your reading more rationally. You can then use the second column to re-assess yourself after working through relevant sections of the chapter, and the third column at some future date if you continue your inquiry in this field, perhaps using some of the resources we refer to throughout the chapter. Please use a rating scale of 1-5 where 1 means that you need a lot of improvement, and 5 means that you already feel competent and/or confident.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL I do/would/can:

• explain the difference between 'diagnostic self-assessment' and self-assessment or self-evaluation as these terms are usually used			
• avoid the problems of an apolitical, technical, individualistic 'needs-meeting' paradigm in education by ensuring that self-assessment of learning needs is preceded by critical situation analysis			
• explain the rationale for and potential problems of diagnostic self-assessment			
• raise learners' awareness about these issues before asking them to assess their learning needs			
• provide opportunities for learners to practise diagnostic self-assessment			
• demonstrate that I am serious about the value of diagnostic self-assessment by allocating formal course time for it			
• explain to learners in advance that I need access to a copy of their completed diagnostic self-assessment forms for administrative and accrediting purposes			
• discuss the use of diagnostic self-assessment forms as learning management tools for self-directed learners			
My additional ideas about diagnostic self-assessment:			
Total:			

Overview: Diagnostic Self-Assessment And Learning Needs

What Is Diagnostic Self-Assessment?

Even if you had never thought about it before, you have seen the self-assessment exercises at the start of each chapter in this book. Can you use your experience of these (and other such) exercises to phrase a working definition of the diagnostic self-assessment process?

Before we define diagnostic self-assessment, it's necessary to clarify what we mean by self-assessment or self-evaluation as well. There is no agreement in the literature about definitions for these terms: they are usually used synonymously, and the process most often referred to concerns learners evaluating their own progress during and after a period of study. In other words, learners look back over past accomplishments and ask: 'Have I done this well enough?' (to get a diploma, to enter the next phase of the course or whatever). Involving learners in this process demands a new conception of the learning-teaching process by learners and educators alike. It gives learners a role in the most sacred of conventional teaching functions – that of deciding fates by assigning grades. We discuss this backward-looking process in Chapter 8. *(Black & Broadfoot, 1982:57; Heron, 1988; Powell, 1981:208; Rogers, 1983:158-9, 189)*

A different process involves learners identifying (or 'diagnosing') their own learning needs at the start of a period of study. This provides a baseline for either learners (in SDL) or educators (in TDL) to plan appropriate learning experiences to meet identified learning needs. It is a forward-looking process, the objective being to help people decide what should be learned. It is a rational way to start any detailed educational planning. We suggest the term 'diagnostic self-assessment' be used to refer to this process. In reality, of course, these theoretical distinctions become blurred: what we call diagnostic self-assessment may have elements of looking back ('what have I previously learned?'), and subsequent self-assessment could equally involve some looking forward ('what should I focus on now that I have learned this?'). Nevertheless, we have found it useful to conceptualize the processes as being distinct.

Does this distinction between diagnostic self-assessment and subsequent self-assessment or self-evaluation make sense to you? Can you see why many conventional educators do not find diagnostic self-assessment as we have defined it as threatening as self-assessment or self-evaluation?

In summary, diagnostic self-assessment, as we use the term here, is a process in which learners assess their existing competencies at the start of a period of study, using a competency profile as the self-assessment instrument. The purpose is to enable learners (in SDL) or educators (in TDL) to identify learning needs, so that rational plans can be made to meet those needs.

Was your definition of diagnostic self-assessment similar to ours?

The Concept Of Learning Needs

We have argued that a major reason for using diagnostic self-assessment at the start of a period of study is to enable learners to identify their own learning needs. Sounds simple and rational, but as we discuss below, this concept of learning needs requires critical consideration. Many educators advocate an approach which will 'meet learners' needs'. Recently, this approach has been criticized. Why do you suppose this might be happening?

Critics of the 'needs-meeting' paradigm are asking whose needs should be considered: the individual's, or the community's; those of middle- or working-class students; of conservative maintainers of the status quo or of people working for social change. *(Brookfield, 1986:287; Griffin, 1983:22; Keddie, 1980:63; Lawson, 1985; Tennant, 1985:8; Thompson, 1980:22)*

Tennant (1985:11) emphasizes that needs assessment is not a technical procedure, but a political issue. It is ultimately concerned with decisions about curriculum content, and as we have previously argued, people's values, ideologies and prejudices are necessarily involved.

> The issue is not whether individuals have needs nor whether they should be met but how these needs are socially and politically constituted and understood, how they are articulated and whose voice is heard. (Keddie, 1980:63)

Many educators fail to design socially and politically relevant programmes. Rather, they try to function in a political and philosophical vacuum – an impossible task – and make uncritical promises to learners that their learning needs, whatever they may be, will be met. So critics quite rightly fear that naive adoption of a needs-meeting approach could result in conservative, individualistic educational programmes. This may be especially likely in some countries where 'adult education' has become a major new enterprise. Because participation in most adult education programmes is voluntary, the pressure is on educators to 'sell' an attractive package to attract 'customers' or 'consumers'. Many funding agencies also exert pressure on educators not to raise controversial issues in their programmes. *(Beder, 1987:109, 112; Brookfield, 1986:21, 295-6; Chamberlain 1961:82; Knowles, 1962:239)*

Mezirow (and see Brookfield, 1986:21) encourages facilitators to raise learners' awareness about how and why they define their learning needs:

> [Adult educators] know that we must respond to initial learner interests and self-defined needs, but we do so with the intent to move the learner to an awareness of the reasons for these needs and how the learners' meaning perspectives may

> have limited the way they customarily perceive, think, feel, and act in defining and attempting to satisfy their needs. (Mezirow, 1990c:357-8)

Boud cautions that in cases where educators impose their view of the world on learners, it may be the educator's needs which get met, rather than the learners:

> To adopt the 'critical' role too enthusiastically is just as limiting as uncritically accepting learners' initial definitions of their needs. (Boud, 1987:236)

Having heard the objections to a needs-meeting approach, can you think of an alternative to replace needs assessment in the curriculum planning process?

One alternative is that individuals not be left to determine their own learning needs, but rather that learning 'priorities' be determined and that these should guide educators and learners.

> ... the issue is whether to adopt a planned or a free-market approach to the economy of adult education. The 'needs-meeting' paradigm is an aspect of the free-market approach.... Its claim to neutrality cannot be sustained. The alternative is to develop a social-policy framework for adult education and to embrace the set of priorities that flow from it. In this way, the language of priorities would replace the language of needs.... (Tennant, 1985:11)

Can you see any potential problems with this approach?

Who will determine these priorities? What vested interests do they have? What values and ideologies will guide them? And anyway, must we as learners passively subject ourselves to the dictates of some external authorities who assume that they know what is best for us to learn? Will this not create learner-dependency rather than autonomy?

We agree that a needs-meeting approach could be conservative and uncritical. But we disagree that it is necessarily so. Some authors too quickly reject needs assessment without examining different contexts in which it could be applied. For us, the key issue is not whether learning needs should be assessed or not, but rather whether needs assessment is preceded by critical analysis of the situation (see Chapter 2) or not. If learners first critically analyse their situations and see themselves operating within a broader social, economic and political context, and if the diagnostic self-assessment instrument (ie competency profile) has been designed with this context firmly in mind, then needs assessment can be both a rational and progressive process. A combination of situation analysis and needs assessment would prevent the problems of both extremes discussed above: the individualistic and conservative tendencies of some 'liberal' adult education approaches; and the external prescription and imposition of 'priorities' which places learners in a passive and dependent role, and which ignores individual differences and interests.

We do not imply that the approach we suggest is 'objective' or 'value-free'. On the contrary, no education occurs in a socio-political vacuum, and the critical situation analysis we advocate is not a neutral academic exercise, as we discuss in Chapter 2. Our argument is simply that individualistic, conservative tendencies can be avoided if needs assessment is preceded by such analysis. We agree with authors like Mezirow (1990c) and Brookfield (1986) that the process of determining learning needs is a negotiated one – a transaction – between learners and facilitators who aim to help them probe beyond their everyday assumptions about themselves and the world.

Educators must be clear about their ideas in this regard so that they can act consistently and explain their approaches to learners and colleagues. What is your opinion about this 'learning needs' debate now that you have read about the controversy? Having examined the concepts of self-assessment and learning needs, let us now consider the reasons for and potential problems of including diagnostic self-assessment as a basic step in the self-directed learning process.

Why Use Diagnostic Self-Assessment Of Learning Needs?

What are the advantages of using diagnostic self-assessment at the start of a learning period? You could draw on your experience of completing self-assessment exercises at the start of each chapter if you have been doing so.

Diagnostic self-assessment increases relevance of learning

Diagnostic self-assessment essentially answers: 'What do I already know, what attitudes do I hold and what skills do I already possess now, at the start of the learning period?' Once existing competencies are identified, they can be excluded from educational plans: there is no point in re-learning material you have already mastered. Learners on an accredited course will, however, be responsible for proving their existing competencies in key areas, as we discuss in Chapters 5 and 8.

In a SDL course, diagnostic self-assessment enables individual learners to focus on their unique learning needs. However, even in a teacher-directed course, diagnostic self-assessments (teacher- or learner-designed) could be used to gauge where the majority of learners need to focus. The curriculum could then be designed to ensure greatest relevance for the majority, as Gcina Radebe explains below. *(Ngubeni & Hill, 1986; Phelps et al, 1985)*

Use Of Diagnostic Self-Assessment By Gcina Radebe And Her Colleagues

We began the paediatric module by asking learners to assess their competencies using a self-assessment form we had designed. Our objectives in doing this were:

- To see which aspects learners feel confident about and which are problems for them, so that we could appropriately focus the group sessions we facilitated.

- To give each learner a chance to assess how much she knows and how much she needs to learn.
- To provide learners with a list of competencies against which they can rate themselves in future to see if there is any improvement in their skills and learning.
- To help learners decide what to focus on during their revision and field work.

Diagnostic self-assessment engages the learner

Self-assessment is an active and engaging process. Educational psychologists, philosophers and practitioners emphasize the importance of making learning situations less passive and alienating, and educators who help learners to improve their study skills stress the need for learners to develop a clear 'mental set' of what they will be learning. Completing a self-assessment form (and the prior step of generating competencies) provides learners with a detailed overview of course content. *(Buzan, 1982; Dewey, 1938; Knowles, 1975, 1980, 1986; Pine & Horne, 1969:110; Rogers, 1983)*

Diagnostic self-assessment is a crucial phase in SDL

SDL promotes learner autonomy, initiative and control. In the previous chapters we have discussed how these qualities can be developed from the beginning of a course. Building a co-operative learning climate (Chapter 1) creates opportunities for learners to take control; involving them in critical situation analysis (Chapter 2) provides them with the 'mental tools' they need to think and act independently; and helping them to generate competencies (Chapter 3) gives them control over a major part of the educational planning process. Asking learners to assess their existing competencies and identify their learning needs provides them with another affirming experience. They are in control of the process, taken seriously and trusted, and actively involved in deciding what should be included when they go on to design their own programme of study (Chapter 5).

As you can see, SDL proceeds through reasonably distinct phases or steps, each building logically on earlier ones and followed by subsequent ones. If the diagnostic self-assessment phase were omitted, learners would have no rational basis for identifying their learning needs before specifying their learning objectives. So diagnostic self-assessment is a crucial phase in the SDL process: all self-directed courses we know of include it. *(Beare, 1985:76; Buzzell & Roman, 1981:135; Ferrier et al, 1988:159; Knowles, 1975:81-91; Sasmor, 1984:172; Shelton, 1981:167; Stephenson, 1981:148)*

In addition, self-assessment can be repeated later: the difference between the initial (diagnostic) and subsequent self-assessments enables learners to 'measure' their learning. If you have been using the self-assessment exercises at the start of a chapter, and then re-rating yourself when you have finished, you can evaluate the effectiveness of this method of evaluating your learning. *(Boud, 1985b:6; Loacker & Doherty, 1984:107)*

It provides a basis for continuing education

Diagnostic self-assessment is crucial for self-directed continuing education, where practitioners periodically identify their learning needs and work to meet them independently of an educational institution. What better time is there to help people learn the necessary skills and develop the confidence they need to become effective self-assessors and continuing learners than when they are formally studying? *(Boud, 1985b:6; Hubbard 1971:422; Woolliscroft et al, 1985:840)*

These are the reasons we could think of that make diagnostic self-assessment worth using. Did you think of additional ideas?

Problems With Diagnostic Self-Assessment

What problems might arise if you implemented diagnostic self-assessment procedures at the start of the course you co-ordinate?

Learners need theoretical and practical orientation

Imagine how learners might feel initially when asked to be frank about their strengths and weaknesses in a diagnostic self-assessment process. Most of us tend to conceal our ignorance from educators and peers: such is the conventional 'educational game' we play. If learners are to take diagnostic self-assessment seriously, they need orientation about the rationale for it and the uses to which their self-assessments will be put; reassurance that they can assess themselves realistically and will not be penalized for honest assessments; and knowledge that diagnostic self-assessment is used in respected programmes internationally.

In addition to this theoretical orientation, learners may need practice and feedback about how to complete self-assessment exercises. For example, if they are not accustomed to using rating scales, they will need practice using the scale suggested. We started by using a three-point scale, but found that small improvements were not easy to measure when learners went back to re-assess themselves at a later date. We have since found a five- or six-point scale most useful.

How valid is diagnostic self-assessment?

The validity of self-assessment techniques is still being debated (see Chapter 8: instruments used for diagnostic self-assessment and for subsequent self-assessment or self-evaluation are often identical). Some learners may either over- or under-estimate their abilities on entry. This may be because trust, theoretical orientation, or practice is lacking, or due to a vaguely-phrased self-assessment instrument. When there is a wide discrepancy between self- and teacher-assessment of existing competencies, a short project prior to entry could serve to demonstrate strengths and weaknesses. *(Arnold et al, 1985a:27; Boud, 1985b:16; Burke, 1969:448; Linn et al, 1975:100; Morton & MacBeth, 1977:167-70; Shelton, 1981:167, 173-4)*

Whose data is it?

Who owns the data on a diagnostic self-assessment form? Is it a self-assessment for the learner alone? Or should the educator and/or peers have access to the completed self-assessments? What do you think and why?

If the educator in a TDL course requests diagnostic self-assessments to design a programme geared to majority learning needs, individuals need not identify themselves. This would only be necessary if serious attempts were being made to individualize learning. In a SDL course, learners and co-ordinators should have established sufficient trust to share this kind of data openly, using it to guide the process of learners setting learning objectives (see Chapter 5). In any event, this issue should be clearly negotiated with learners beforehand, so that no one feels under pressure at the end of the process to share their data with others if they do not feel comfortable doing so.

Did you think of other potential problems to avoid? In the next section, we consider how diagnostic self-assessment can best be introduced and applied. Before moving on, you may want to review your learning so far by completing the periodic review.

Periodic Review

1. How would you define diagnostic self-assessment as we have used the term?
2. We have argued that a distinction should be made between diagnostic self-assessment and subsequent self-assessment or self-evaluation. Try to explain to a colleague why we argued this, and also say whether you agree or disagree with us, and why.
3. Having considered the arguments of proponents of the 'needs-meeting' paradigm and those of their critics, what is your opinion about the issue of using learning needs to guide curriculum planning?
4. You decide to introduce learning needs assessment (preceded by critical situation analysis) into the course you co-ordinate. A colleague asks why – 'After all', she says, 'the students have been doing perfectly well with our teaching until now'. How would you defend your decision to her?
5. A major potential limitation of diagnostic self-assessment relates to inadequate orientation of learners. To prepare your thoughts for the next section, make some notes about how you could avoid this in your work.

Applying Diagnostic Self-Assessment

Pre-Course Preparation

Because diagnostic self-assessment may be an unfamiliar strategy, learners might benefit from an introduction to the idea before they begin a course. For example, if learners receive a course brochure, or attend an introductory session before enrolling, the concept of diagnostic self-assessment could be discussed there so that applicants are at least aware that this approach will be used.

During The Initial Phases Of The Course

Explain how diagnostic self-assessment fits in

In Chapter 3 we explained how we asked self-directed learners themselves to generate the steps in curriculum design. Afterwards, participants were quite clear about why each step was included, and why it should follow some but precede other steps. As a result, once we had co-operatively generated the competency profile, participants already understood that they would then use the profile as their diagnostic self-assessment instrument. The process of self-assessment thus flowed quite logically from the other preparatory work the group had done.

Involve learners in generating competency items

If, in addition to generating the steps in curriculum design, participants are also involved in generating the items included in the final competency profile (see Chapter 3), they will be familiar with the content of the instrument. We find that this builds a feeling of commitment to the diagnostic self-assessment process which is not so strong when we ask participants (eg in a short workshop) to use a pre-prepared self-assessment instrument.

Provide theoretical orientation about diagnostic self-assessment

We cannot assume that learners will trust their own assessments, or appreciate the benefits of the diagnostic self-assessment process. On the contrary, we recommend a brief orientation about the rationale for and potential problems of self-assessment, how it has been used in other respected educational programmes, and some reassurance that the assessments will be taken seriously by the course co-ordinators.

Schedule practice sessions

For most learners, self-assessment is a new skill which needs to be mastered. Some participants may be unfamiliar with using rating scales and others may interpret the scale inappropriately. For example, we found that some people rate themselves at the highest score when they feel 'competent', but others only do so if they think they are 'absolutely perfect' in that aspect. A brief practice session with a group discussion afterwards could reveal these issues before the self-assessment instrument is formally completed.

Allocate formal course time for diagnostic self-assessment

Rather than ask learners to complete their self-assessments at home in their own time, we allocate formal course time for learners to assess themselves. We hope that this shows respect for their assessments and that we regard diagnostic self-assessment as a crucial phase in the SDL process.

Make copies of completed forms available to co-ordinators

In a SDL course, the co-ordinator needs to know how each learner has assessed her/himself, to be of help during the contract-writing phase (see Chapter 5) and also to have complete records for administrative purposes (see Chapter 8). The need for a copy of the completed self-assessment instrument to be handed in to the course co-ordinator should therefore be negotiated with participants beforehand. As previously mentioned, in a TDL course, learners can remain anonymous.

Later On During The Course

Provide orientation about how to use the self-assessment form as a learning management tool

The self-assessment form can be used and re-used as a learning management tool by learners, as we discuss in Chapter 6. In addition, co-ordinators of self-directed learning can use the forms to keep track of individual progress (see Chapter 8).

In the extract below, educators explain how diagnostic self-assessment can help learners to control and manage at least some aspects of their learning although the course as a whole was largely teacher-directed.

> ***Extract From Diagnostic Self-Assessment Form Designed By Nesta Ngubeni And Colleagues At Madadeni Hospital, South Africa***
>
> Now that you have decided what competencies you need in order to provide good maternal and child care at a clinic, the next step is to decide which of these competencies you already possess. During the next two months you can then spend less time on these aspects, leaving you with more time to concentrate on those aspects which you feel you are not so good at. (Detailed diagnostic self-assessment instrument follows.)
>
> Thank you for completing this form. Please keep it safely and refer to it from time to time to make sure that you are learning about those things which you feel you need to learn most about. We will be presenting a basic course in maternal and child care over the next 6-8 weeks, after which we will ask you to review your self-assessment form to find out which topics you would like to spend more time on. There will then be an additional two weeks for you to concentrate individually on the topics of greatest concern to you. By then, we hope that everyone will have attained a high standard in all aspects of maternal and child care.

Encourage subsequent re-assessment of competencies

Learners may be encouraged if they use the same instrument to re-assess their competencies after a period of learning. Have you found this to be true if you have been assessing and re-assessing yourself before and after working through the chapters in this book?

Do you have other ideas about how to introduce and use diagnostic self-assessment?

Periodic Review And Issues To Consider

1. Which of the steps discussed above (and any others you have added to the list) would you use if you introduced diagnostic self-assessment into the course you co-ordinate?
2. What methods apart from (or as well as) diagnostic self-assessment could you use to help learners to 'diagnose' their learning needs at the start of a course? Our ideas are offered below.

   Depending on the competencies involved, learners could role-play certain skills and get feedback from peers and co-ordinators. Better still, you could tape-record or video them performing particular skills, and they could then listen to the recording or watch a replay and gain some insight into their relative strengths and weaknesses in that way. In some cases, a type of practical or even written test or examination with detailed feedback from the examiners might be most useful. Pre-tests and post-tests may help learners identify their learning needs initially, to measure their learning over a period of time, and to identify priorities for revision and continuing learning. Did you think of other methods?

3. What unique advantage does diagnostic self-assessment have over all these alternative methods of diagnosing learning needs?

   Self-assessment is entirely under the control of the learner concerned. This makes it an ideal starting point for adult and especially self-directed learners. If learners are involved in developing the self-assessment instrument itself as we discussed in Chapter 3, their control over the process is even greater.

4. Some educators fear that learners may abuse the diagnostic self-assessment process and rate themselves as more competent than they really are in order to get away with less work during a course. Is that a fear you have? (Did you 'cheat' when you completed the self-assessment exercise at the start of this chapter? Why/not?) Can you think what safeguard exists in a self-directed course to prevent such abuse?

   The safeguard is that learners are responsible for submitting 'evidence of accomplishment' (see Chapter 5) to prove that they have learned something new, or 'evidence of competency' if they feel they are already competent. In other words, they cannot simply rate themselves as competent and leave it at that. The onus is on them to demonstrate their existing competencies to co-ordinators (on behalf of the accreditors).

Practical Exercises

You may want to complete some of these or other self-designed practical exercises if you are considering introducing or improving the use of diagnostic self-assessments in your work.

1. Prepare a draft of the introductory and concluding paragraphs which would change a competency profile into a diagnostic self-assessment instrument for learners. (You may want to look back at Nesta Ngubeni's and Gcina Radebe's ideas above, and the introduction to the self-assessment exercise at the start of this chapter.)
2. Look critically at your draft from 1 above. What tone have you adopted: formal and superior, or more relaxed and encouraging? (Which would you prefer to read if you were a learner?) Do you sound enthusiastic about the diagnostic self-assessment process? (Does it matter? Or do the feelings and attitudes of educators not really affect learners?) What rating scale have you chosen to use and why? Is the layout attractive? (Does it look as though you respect the learners who will be using it?) What needs changing now that you have been critical of your work?
3. When you have revised your draft, ask for feedback from colleagues, friends and learners. Thereafter, make final corrections to the instrument.
4. Plan and budget time for the sessions you consider necessary to orientate learners to diagnostic self-assessment, and for them to complete their forms.
5. You are co-ordinating a self-directed course with 15 participants. One person constantly under-estimates her abilities and has rated herself very low on nearly every competency item in the diagnostic self-assessment instrument. Yet you have experienced her to be skilful and competent in all the interactions you have observed, and others in the group look to her as a role model. You conclude that she is a self-effacing and unconfident person who needs some help in gaining a more realistic and positive self-image. How might you try to help her? Specifically, how could you use the diagnostic self-assessment form in this process?
6. In the same group, there is one person who appears to be over-confident, and he rates himself very positively in the diagnostic self-assessment instrument. What you have seen of his performance suggests that he is not as skilled as he thinks he is. How can you help this learner to gain a more realistic picture of his competencies – without being harsh or risking destruction of his enthusiasm and confidence?
7. You have been asked to convene a three-day workshop about the use of audio-visual aids for a group of 12 newly appointed college lecturers. Some have worked as lecturers before, others are recently qualified with no practical experience. You decide to begin the workshop with a diagnostic self-assessment phase, and then to adapt the sessions to meet participants' specific learning needs. Draft a rough timetable for the self-assessment phase, ensuring maximum participation by the group but also ensuring that there will be enough time for them to meet their learning needs during the workshop. (Some comments about the process we used in a workshop follow for you to consider.)

We were asked to convene a three-day workshop for health worker educators about 'adult education'. Because the participants included both experienced and inexperienced educators, we decided to begin – after introductions and ice-breaking sessions (see Chapter 1) – with a diagnostic self-assessment process, and to plan the rest of the workshop around the learning needs participants identified. Having got participants' agreement in principle to use this process, we asked them first to think individually and to make a note of any weaknesses in their practice as educators that they would like to improve on. This took about five minutes. Next, we handed out a pre-prepared diagnostic self-assessment form (seven pages long) and asked participants to rate themselves on each specific competency we had identified. (In a short workshop like this, there was not enough time to include participants in generating this form, but at least the first step of individual thinking ensured that their ideas could be incorporated as well.) This took about 45 minutes. Third, we asked participants to look back at the notes they had made initially, and to consider their self-assessments, and from that to write down, in order of priority for them, four broad areas they would like to focus on in the workshop.

Once this was done, each person wrote their four priorities on separate pieces of cardboard, each with their name attached. These cards were stuck on the wall in such a way that similar priorities were placed together. People who had similar interests and needs could thus easily be identified and they formed working groups. Our job at this stage was not easy: we had to schedule time for each group to meet, and ensure that individuals would not be expected to be in two or three different sessions at the same time! This was not always possible, so people sometimes had to make a choice about which session to attend. These working groups formed the basis of the workshop structure, and each group decided its own objectives for the session, and decided how to handle report-backs, note-taking and so on.

The whole diagnostic self-assessment process, formation of working groups and scheduling of sessions took two hours of workshop time. After a break, the first working sessions began. The evaluation at the end of the workshop was very positive, with people feeling that, for a change, their learning needs had been seriously considered and met. (For another account of 'open structure' workshop design, see Hodgson & Reynolds, 1987.)

8. Compare the process we described above with that of a conventional, teacher-directed workshop where all the sessions have been pre-planned. Make a note of the principles of adult education which have been applied in the approach starting with diagnostic self-assessment. (Our ideas appear below.)

- If helped to reflect on real-life problems and experiences, adult learners can diagnose their own learning needs.

- Learners and facilitators are equal participants in learning.
- Learners can be useful resources to themselves, to other participants and to facilitators.
- Learners are capable of planning and managing their own learning.
- The facilitator can offer resources to the group (eg the pre-prepared self-assessment form), but should not take control of the educational process.
- A major role for facilitators is to structure sessions in which learners can take control for themselves.

Did you think of other ideas to add?

Conclusion

In this chapter we have discussed how a competency profile can be adapted for use as a diagnostic self-assessment instrument so learners can identify their individual learning needs. We have argued that as long as a prior critical situation analysis is done, self-assessment of learning needs is both a rational and a progressive way to begin detailed educational planning. Once existing strengths and weaknesses have been identified, learners are ready to draft learning agreements which will specify what learning must be done to meet the learning needs they have now diagnosed. We discuss learning agreements in the next chapter.

As usual, we suggest that you end this chapter by using the self-assessment exercise at the start to re-assess yourself now, and to plan your further learning accordingly. Although the literature is still poorly developed in this sphere, we hope that the resources referred to in this chapter will be of use if you decide to read more about this phase of the self-directed learning process.

Chapter 5

Drafting Learning Agreements

One open-ended device that helps to give both security and responsibility within an atmosphere of freedom is the use of student contracts. There is no doubt that this also helps to assuage the uncertainties and insecurities the facilitator may be experiencing. (Rogers, 1983:149)

Chapter Preview

'You co-ordinate a course with no pre-defined curriculum? Learners design their own individual curricula?' You will have to deal with these incredulous questions if you implement a critical self-directed learning (SDL) course. If you're like us, before your course begins, you may even find yourself feeling a bit sceptical about your proposals to share control over curriculum planning with learners. 'Will they really manage to design their own curricula?' we wondered. Only after the course had begun did we see for ourselves how rational, challenging and liberating the use of learning agreements (learning contracts) really is. Only then did we emotionally accept what we had accepted intellectually beforehand: learners can indeed share control in planning their own learning.

Having diagnosed their learning needs using self-assessment (Chapter 4), learners can then make detailed plans to meet their needs. We have found learning agreements which include specific learning objectives to be a useful way of doing this. In this chapter we focus on learning agreements designed by individual learners to meet their unique learning needs; we also briefly mention group contracting to meet common needs. Then, in the next chapter, we discuss how we can help learners manage their own learning.

The main questions we address in this chapter are:

- What is a learning agreement?
- Is it necessary for learners to specify learning objectives in their agreements?
- What are the reasons for and potential problems of using learning agreements in a critical self-directed course?
- How can we prepare learners to draft learning agreements?

Self-Assessment

This exercise helps you to assess your existing competencies and plan your reading more rationally. Please use a rating scale of 1-5 where 1 means that you need a lot of improvement, and 5 means that you are already competent. As usual, we provide additional columns for you to re-assess yourself after working through this chapter, and then again if you decide to continue your inquiry, perhaps using some of the resources we refer to throughout the chapter.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

- explain to learners and colleagues what a learning agreement (learning contract) is
- consider the arguments for and against using learning objectives, especially in critical self-directed learning
- set clear learning objectives myself, and help learners to do so too
- consider alternative ways of implementing contract learning so that the approach I use is most suitable for the learners with whom I work
- debate the rationale for using learning contracts
- critically consider potential limitations of using contract learning, and think of ways to prevent or overcome these in my work
- ensure that learners are adequately oriented to contract learning by:
    - providing pre-course information about contract learning
    - introducing the concept of learning agreements formally and providing opportunities for learners to consider the advantages and disadvantages of this approach
    - providing resources about writing learning objectives
    - scheduling practice and feedback sessions while learners are learning how to draft their learning agreements
    - encouraging learners to think of original ways they could provide evidence of existing competencies and of new learning
    - emphasizing that a learning agreement can only be finalized when both parties – the learner and myself as a representative of the accrediting agency – are satisfied; it is developed through negotiation and can only be changed by negotiation

    - providing follow-up support through personal correspondence, circular letters, individual consultations or other means until a learning agreement has been finalized and accepted as an individual curriculum
    - providing written notice to the learner when her/his agreement is accepted
    - arranging formal sessions to discuss alternative methods of managing their learning (see Chapter 6)
- encourage periodic re-negotiation of the terms in the learning agreements to ensure flexibility and relevance for learners
- encourage learners to make a major re-evaluation of their agreements after a period of time

My additional ideas about learning agreements:

Total:

Overview: Learning Agreements And Learning Objectives

What Is A Learning Agreement (Learning Contract)?

What kind of details would you expect a learning agreement to contain, and why?

A learning agreement or learning contract is a detailed statement prepared by the learner, usually with support from a mentor or facilitator. It is developed after learning needs have been diagnosed (Chapter 4), and most commonly includes details about what will be learned (usually phrased as learning objectives), how it will be learned, by when, what criteria will be used to evaluate the learning, and how learning will be validated. Perhaps their major strength is that learning agreements put learners in greater control of their own learning: they take major responsibility for planning, managing, and evaluating their own learning. *(Buzzell & Roman, 1981:135-40; Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986:227; Knowles, 1975:25-8, 62-3; 1980:381; Lehmann, 1975; Lindquist, 1975; Stephenson, 1981:148-55)*

In what ways is a learning agreement like a curriculum?

A curriculum is normally said to include a statement of objectives, teaching methods, a timetable, and assessment methods. A learning agreement has the same elements as a curriculum, except that they are rephrased to focus on the learner rather than the teacher. In other words, a learning contract is an individual, learner-designed curriculum. The extract below is one objective from a learning agreement drafted by Vivienne Tjapepua, a

Namibian health worker educator with whom we worked. For a wide variety of other examples of learning contracts, see Knowles (1986).

Extract From A Learning Agreement Drafted By Vivienne Tjapepua

Conditions: By the end of May 1986, after discussions with tutors, reviewing various teaching materials which relate to family planning, and reading relevant books and articles, I will be able to:

Act: draft a lesson plan

Content: about injectable contraceptives for a group of about six non-practising registered nurses.

Evaluation criteria: The lesson plan will be drafted in such a way that it specifies at least the lesson duration, objectives, teaching-learning methods, media and evaluation tools I will use.

Evidence of accomplishment: The lesson plan will be sent to the course co-ordinators for comments and feedback.

We use the phrase 'learning agreement' because it sounds less legalistic and more open to negotiation than 'learning contract'. The term 'final learning agreement' (FLA) is used to distinguish the final draft which course participants submit for formal approval from their earlier working drafts or 'preliminary learning agreements' (PLAs). However, the 'final' draft remains negotiable and can be changed provided both the learner and a course co-ordinator agree. The FLA consists of detailed learning objectives (see the extract from Vivienne Tjapepua's learning agreement above) and a time plan stating self-set deadlines for presentation of 'evidence of accomplishment' for each learning objective and 'evidence of competency' for competencies which have previously been mastered. Some participants phrase general learning goals as well, to remind themselves of the long-term purposes of their learning efforts. This format provides learners and ourselves with a clear picture of what learning will be done; using what resources; by when; and who will evaluate and validate it using what criteria. We asked participants to reflect on the process of drafting learning agreements at the end of their course:

Reflections By Learners About Their Learning Agreements And The Process Of Drafting Them

- 'It took much of our time, and it was initially confusing and felt very difficult. But now, when I look back, the experience was very valuable. In addition to theorizing about designing a curriculum, I actually, practically designed one. This helped demystify the process of curriculum design.'
- 'It is a frustrating experience to write a learning agreement but it made me really think about what I was doing on the course. I am glad I have done it as the principles of curriculum design will stick in my mind and although I may never write a detailed learning agreement again my new knowledge of the process of curriculum design will help me with future learning plans.'

- 'I really valued my learning agreement. It represents me as an individual with my own learning needs.'

Given that a learning agreement largely consists of detailed learning objectives, we now consider the controversial issue of objectives.

The Behavioural Objectives Controversy

Can you define a behavioural objective?

A behavioural objective is a statement about the behaviour learners are expected to exhibit at the end of a learning period that they could not exhibit beforehand. Different people recommend different degrees of specificity in phrasing an objective. The format suggested by Mager (and adopted by many educators) includes a statement of the content to be learned, the conditions under which learning should occur, the action or behaviour a successful learner will exhibit, and the evaluation criteria to be used. *(Ewan, 1984:31-7; Fulop, 1978:303-4; Guilbert, 1981:1.17, 1.49-1.50; Mager, 1962:3; Stenhouse, 1975:54)*

In the case of self-directed courses, an additional element is necessary. Can you think what this is?

In formal self-directed learning courses, a statement about what 'evidence of accomplishment' a learner will provide to prove that the objective has in fact been achieved is needed. (You may want to refer back to the extract from Vivienne Tjapepua's learning agreement again now.) If you would like to learn more about how to write detailed objectives, Appendix 4 includes extracts from a handout we designed to help workshop participants through this process. The handout was based on our previous experience of helping self-directed learners design learning agreements.

Can you think of some advantages of using objectives?

Authors give many reasons in support of objectives: publicly stated objectives increase educator accountability; their use tends to focus attention on commonly neglected aspects such as helping learners become more analytical, critical, and more aware of their attitudes and values; their use makes the choice of educational strategies and the evaluation of learners and teaching more rational; and they provide a 'map' to guide both educators and learners. *(Asencio, 1985:16; Girod, 1973; Guilbert, 1981:1.03, 1.06, 1.38-1.39; Mager, 1962:vii-viii; McAvoy, 1985:32; Popham, 1977; Stenhouse, 1975:76; Wiseman & Pidgeon, 1977)*

> ... if you're not sure where you're going, you're liable to end up someplace else – and not even know it. (Mager, 1962:vii)

Asencio (1985) reviewed 111 studies about objectives and concluded that there is a small positive effect on learner achievement in general when behavioural objectives are used. However, in none of these studies were objectives set by learners; in only 18 were action, conditions and criteria specified; in only 26 had the educator been trained or made aware of how to use objectives; and in only 52 had the students been made aware of how to use objectives as learning aids. Our own sense is that educators have only scratched the surface of the potential of learning objectives, and that they deserve further application. Learner-set objectives seem especially promising.

What advantages do learner-set objectives in self-directed learning have over teacher-set objectives?

First, they are written by the learners to meet their own learning needs, and are therefore much more likely to be relevant. Second, learners are likely to be better motivated to achieve self-set objectives. Third, because objectives should specify evaluation criteria, learners are automatically involved in the important educational function of evaluation. Fourth, they make communication about the self-directed learning process clear for learners, facilitators and accreditors. Did you think of other ideas? *(Black & Broadfoot, 1982:62; Buzzell & Roman, 1981:141; Knowles, 1975:13; Powell, 1981:208; Stephenson, 1981:150-2)*

What may be the disadvantages of using learning objectives?

Several authors question or oppose objectives. Their arguments are that objectives make education restrictive and inflexible; that educators often oversimplify subjects because simple recall of facts and menial skills can be most easily phrased as behavioural objectives; that they dehumanize the essentially human pursuits of teaching and learning; and that to specify objectives in advance is undemocratic. Griffin (1977:14) and Jones (1982:168) specifically warn that using objectives in adult education may enable educators to maintain control. This important issue is taken up later in this chapter when we discuss potential problems of using objectives. *(Asencio, 1985:17; Black & Broadfoot, 1982:36; Davie, 1987:199; Denis & Richter, 1987:29; Eisner, 1977; Griffin, 1977:14-15; Jones, 1982:168; Kelly, 1977:30-44; McAvoy, 1985:32; Simpson, 1980:230; Stenhouse, 1975:61, 70-97)*

We believe many of the arguments against objectives do not apply if learners rather than educators set them. Also, the use of objectives in no way precludes using and valuing intuitive learning. Finally, these critiques fail to debate the role of objectives as learning management tools for self-directed learners and course co-ordinators. All the innovators we know of who have implemented contract learning recommend using objectives in learning contracts. *(Boucouvalas & Pearse, 1985:101; Buzzell & Roman, 1981; Denis & Richter, 1987; Heie & Sweet, 1984:148; Henderson & Hyre, 1979:71; Knowles, 1975, 1980, 1986; Rogers, 1983:149; Stephenson, 1981; Tompkins & McGraw, 1988)*

Even in teacher-directed settings, we believe the problems caused by educators and learners 'not knowing where they are going' are worse than the potential problems mentioned by critics of objectives. The challenge is to be critical about using objectives. Too often their introduction into institutions has been fanatical and people have spent more time 'writing objectives' than considering how, when and why to use them to improve learning.

The question SDL co-ordinators must ask is: would the learners with whom I work benefit from using learning agreements (which include detailed learning objectives)? What is the answer for you personally at this stage, and why? Perhaps you will want to revise your opinion about the value of learning agreements after working through the sections that follow. First, we consider alternative ways of using contract learning. Thereafter, we discuss the major advantages and disadvantages of using individual learning agreements.

Alternative Ways Of Using Contract Learning

The major focus in this chapter is individual learning contracts which the learners themselves prepare. However, educators have experimented with other variations of contracting, and you may think of yet others. The books by Knowles and his associates (1984, 1986) provide descriptions of many variations on the contract theme. Some educators wisely adapt contract learning to make it more appropriate for their particular situations, but others seem afraid to 'let go' of control over learners.

Woolf (1984) describes a course where learners get limited choice by contracting to achieve certain objectives from a pre-determined list. Knowles (1986:39) mentions the possibility of objectives being prescribed, but allowing learners to choose learning strategies. Caffarella (1983:25) suggests that junior students complete only a small part of the contract, the rest having been pre-specified by the educator. Boud (1989:27), Kruse & Fager Barger (1982:35) and Knowles (1986:140-9) mention a modified contract approach where learners contract for particular grades in advance, deciding which level of achievement to aim for by looking at teacher-specified criteria.

Rogers (1983:46-9) mentions daily 'work contracts' between a schoolteacher and her pupils. This seems appropriate for learners who cannot easily cope with longer-term or more detailed planning. Knowles (1986:50-1) reports a case where gradual introduction of contract learning as an option proved easier for resistant learners to accept than compulsory, large-scale contracting. Bradley (1975:70) suggests 'organic exploratory contracts' in which learners and facilitators decide each week what the learners will do, until they have developed a clear picture of their learning needs. Lehmann (1975:128) uses a series of limited learning contracts, each one spanning between one to six months of the full course. Rogers (1983:151) also suggests the use of 'limited contracts' at first. This would ensure that learners do not feel overwhelmed by the task of compiling a single, comprehensive contract for a whole year, for example. Henderson & Hyre (1979:74) recommend multiple small contracts which build on each other over time. Boucouvalas & Pearse (1985:103) suggest that the first contract be completed in five to eight weeks – a period they have found long enough in which to achieve something useful, but short enough for learners to sense some accomplishment. However, short-term contracts require frequent negotiation, and therefore frequent contacts between learners and facilitators. They may not be feasible on part-time and distance learning courses. Heie & Sweet (1984) use contracts for faculty development. They suggest 'growth contracts' each spanning a year, but with a long-term goal in mind.

The inclusion of group work within an individual contract is mentioned by Lehmann (1975:132) and Cowan (1988:198). Learners with similar learning needs can study together on certain aspects.

Kemmis (1985:157-62) refers to curriculum negotiation with a whole learning group. Millar et al (1986) discuss 'curriculum contracting' with a learning group doing a university course in adult education. Some of their insightful reflections are included later in this chapter. Hodgson & Reynolds (1987) describe the process of involving a 'learning community' in designing and managing learning experiences. (See also Harber & Meighan [1986] and Meighan & Harber [1986].)

Did you think of any other adaptations of a learning contract approach?

Our major experience has been with individually negotiated learning agreements within a supportive group of learners all working in the same broad occupational field. We may be biased, but we agree with Brookfield:

> No doubt the most satisfying educational experience, for learners and educators alike, occurs when the sense of individual control brought on by becoming aware of one's unique learning style and by negotiating individual curricula and objectives is married to an involvement in an ongoing learning group in which one's ideas, experiences and achievements are subjected to collective exploration and interpretation by group members. (Brookfield, 1986:62)

Why Use Learning Agreements?

Why do you think learning agreements should be recommended? (Please note that the emphasis in this section is on individual learning agreements; the issues raised may not necessarily apply to group contracting. If you are more interested in group work, you may want to adapt and expand our ideas.)

Learning agreements protect learners and accreditors

Integrating self-directed learning into educational institutions requires careful structuring if the principles of SDL are to be upheld, if education is to be made more accessible to adults with many responsibilities, and if the academic and bureaucratic demands of the accrediting institution are to be met. Learning contracts provide a basis for doing all this, and for creating conditions where, in Knowles's terms (1986:xi), 'magical things' can happen. Contract learning provides an ideal bridge for learners entering a SDL course but accustomed to TDL. Learners enter with educational histories, expectations, fears and so on which must be taken into account. We have found the logic and structure provided by learning agreements to be both comforting and challenging for ourselves as course co-ordinators and for self-directed learners themselves. *(Caffarella, 1983:7; Rogers, 1983:149-50)*

Both learners and accreditors are protected by learning agreements. Acceptance of an agreement by the accrediting agency says to the self-directed learner: 'Provided you do what you say you will do, we will award the qualification'. Therein lies the protection for the learner. On the other hand, acceptance of the agreement by the learner says to the accreditor: 'You are only obliged to accredit my work provided I do what I say I will do in this agreement, or provided that any changes I make are duly negotiated'. Therein lies the protection for the accreditor.

Given that so much depends on the terms specified in the learning agreement, people have found it important to specify intentions and plans as precisely as possible. Can you see how the use of detailed learning objectives as discussed above is an appropriate strategy for achieving this?

Learners experience major benefits

Enabling learners to draft their own learning agreements is a major step in the direction of increasing learner autonomy, empowerment and control. Several authors have noted that learners experience personal growth and increased self-esteem after they have succeeded. *(Boucouvalas & Pearse, 1985:104; Kilcullen, 1985; Richardson, 1987:203; Rogers, 1983:70-1; Sasmor, 1984:171; Woolf, 1984)*

Contract learners also become more creative in identifying resources and sources of evidence, use their initiative more, and become more confident and independent. The reflections below are from some South African course co-ordinators who introduced group contracting to overcome learner dependency and increase learner control. *(Brown & Martin, 1987:68; Cowan, 1988:203; Knowles, 1975:25; 1986:46; Kuhn & Fasano, 1984; Richardson, 1987:205-6; Rogers, 1983:47; Stephenson, 1988:215, 221; Tompkins & McGraw, 1988:173; Woolf, 1984:79)*

> ***Reflections On Why Group Contracting Was Introduced, By Clive Millar, Tony Morphet And Tony Saddington***
>
> Before introducing group contracting in 1982, we had co-ordinated two previous Diploma Courses in Adult Education which had all the characteristics of a typical academic programme. Staff were in full and undisputed possession of the course content. The lecture programme was decided in advance and delivered on assigned dates to attentive audiences.... It was judged by most to be a stimulating and successful course.
>
> However, we became aware of severe limitations of this approach. The curriculum took the form of sustained learner dependence on staff, for knowledge, for course design, for validation of achievement, and for leadership. This had undermined the capacity of our learners to take responsibility for their own

> learning. Staff had come dangerously close to doing their learning for them. As a result of this experience we decided that we would not again enter the course as the owners of a curriculum or the designers of a programme. Our first obligation would have to be an extended negotiation with students about what we all wished to do.

Apart from increasing learner autonomy, using learning contracts – especially individual ones – means that learners can work to meet their own identified learning needs, rather than following a pre-determined course of studies. They are also free to work in their own preferred learning styles, at their own pace, using sequencing which is personally meaningful. *(Brown, 1983; Caffarella, 1983:7; Chessell, 1986; Knowles, 1986:41; Lehmann, 1975:135; Newble & Entwistle, 1986; Sasmor, 1984:171; Stephenson, 1981:145, 150; Tompkins & McGraw, 1988:173)*

All these benefits improve the quality of learning. In addition, contract learners tend to be more motivated to achieve their self-set objectives and thus learn more relevant content, more effectively. *(Brown & Martin, 1987:68; Caffarella, 1983:7; Cowan, 1988:204; Knowles, 1975:14; 1986:37, 41-2, 46; Lehmann, 1975:132; Rogers, 1983:64; Stephenson, 1988:220; Tompkins & McGraw, 1988:173)*

Contract learning has wide applicability

The resources by Knowles and his associates (1984, 1986) illustrate just how widely applicable contract learning is: it is now being extensively used in universities, colleges, clinical placements, professional courses, continuing education courses, staff development centres, and schools. Moreover:

> Our experience suggests, after over 2000 examples, that most people are capable of studying independently if they want to or if they have to. (Stephenson, 1988:219)

Co-operative work can be encouraged

Some educators fear that self-directed learning may cause learners to become 'self-centred', and that individualizing learning will cause people to become 'individualistic' and unconcerned about others. Do you think this is likely?

Brookfield (1986:83), Rogers (1983:66) and Tompkins & McGraw (1988:179) say contract learning tends to alter the usual sense of competition between learners: a co-operative, interdependent and supportive atmosphere usually develops instead. This has been our experience as well. It is worth repeating: self-direction does not mean learning in isolation. There is nothing to prevent co-operative work between fellow learners or between self-directed learners and a variety of resource people. For example, a small group of learners with similar learning needs may decide to work together on a particular aspect, and this shared work can be built in to their individual contracts. Evaluation of such work may be done collectively or individually. *(Cowan, 1988:198; Kasworm, 1983:51; Knowles, 1986:46; Kruse & Fager Barger, 1982:37; Lehmann, 1975:135; Rogers, 1983:47, 63; Tough, 1967:15, 30)*

Contracting prepares learners for lifelong learning

The skills and confidence gained by contract learners prepares them for continuing self-directed work after their formal education has ended. Given the 'knowledge explosion', the skill of being able to continue learning throughout life has become essential. *(Boud, 1981a:12; Buzzell & Roman, 1981:143; Cornwall, 1988:251; Dewey, 1938:49-50; Knapper, 1988:91; Knowles, 1975:15-17; 1986:46; Lehmann, 1975:136; Loacker & Doherty, 1984:101; Tompkins & McGraw, 1988:173; Tough, 1967:15)*

Did you think of other ideas to add? If you are more likely to be implementing group contracting in your work, you may want to summarize the points made above – and the others you have added – which apply to group contracting.

Problems To Avoid

As usual, we suggest that you think of your own ideas before reading ours below. What problems may emerge if you implement contract learning?

Inadequate orientation of learners

> The ability to write contracts is a learned skill, and facilitators must spend considerable time helping students to focus on realistic and manageable activities. (Brookfield, 1986:81)

Learners will need careful orientation to help them understand and cope with the unfamiliar demands of contract learning. Authors have commented on what can go wrong when learners are poorly prepared, fail to adapt to, resist, or reject a new idea like contracting. Higgs (1988:44-5) recommends using a self-assessment exercise about 'readiness for SDL' to help prepare learners mentally. See Knowles (1975:61) for an example of a suitable self-assessment form. *(Beare, 1985:77; Boud, 1981a:13; Cowan, 1988; Millar et al, 1986; Powell, 1981:207; 1988:118; Rogers, 1983:66)*

The analysis below shows how one group of South African university students initially responded to the idea of group contracting:

> ***Reflections On Learner Resistance To Group Contracting By Clive Millar, Tony Morphet And Tony Saddington***
>
> The learners arrived with the information that the course and its curriculum were open for the group to create. The staff began the first session by re-stating this position in which the responsibility for course and curriculum design was clearly placed in the hands of the group (ie both learners and staff). This opening was greeted with ongoing disbelief and created an initial vacuum of leadership and responsibility. Learners were clearly disturbed that the staff refused to 'perform' their traditional teaching roles.... There were half-joking references to a 'plot' and to the cleverness of 'the plan' and the staff's 'hidden agenda'. Some simply closed up and showed their resistance with silence. Yet others expressed frustration and asked that the group 'get down to work', 'get started', or 'be practical'. The climax of the resistance came when one learner, claiming to represent more than half of the group, delivered an articulate and emotional challenge to the staff. She said that she felt manipulated by a 'technique' which

> she did not understand and over which she had no control. The staff response included an affirmation of her freedom from manipulation: there was no staff 'plot'. Resistance gradually faded as a force within the group after this climax.
>
> Throughout the phase of resistance, several learners tried to suggest ideas of ways forward, but with no clear process for group decision-making, nor a willingness by the group to allow individuals other than the staff to emerge as leaders, these attempts failed.... The traditional staff role remained empty, and no learner was being allowed to fill it. At the same time, while the staff role was unoccupied, learners seemed unable to fill their traditional roles of receiving and responding to proposals made by peers. In a situation in which all roles were suspended, there was no basis for decision and action.

Even if the idea is not resisted or rejected, many learners initially experience confusion, anxiety, fear, and frustration. *(Hodgson & Reynolds, 1987:154; Kasworm, 1983:52; Richardson, 1987:203-4; Rogers, 1983:46-7; Tompkins & McGraw, 1988:183; Whittaker, 1984:39)*

> At one point, writing the contract became our major assignment for the year! That is, rather than a means to an end, it became an end in itself. Many, many hours of student and faculty time were wasted that year because we lost sight of the contract as a learning tool and tried, instead, to produce the 'perfect' contract.... [Later] Faculty and students alike had reached a level of comfort, even affection, with the contract. We had learned to write it with ease and use it with confidence. It had become the indispensable tool it was meant to be, which made our learning uniquely our own. (Buzzell & Roman, 1981:142)

Something we and others have found is that after learners have spent so much energy compiling their contracts, some feel loath to redraft them and negotiate for changes. However, to get the most out of contract learning, contracts must be flexible and responsive to changing learning needs. (Of course, any changes must be duly negotiated in advance.) Perhaps the solution is not to spend too much time trying to perfect the contract initially, and to ensure that learners expect to make changes as they progress. *(Buzzell & Roman, 1981:142; Davie, 1987:204; Higgs, 1988:40; Knowles, 1986:32; Lehmann, 1975:133; Tompkins & McGraw, 1988:182)*

Many students find writing the contract the most difficult part of the self-directed learning process. Making learners aware of this at the outset may reassure them somewhat, but they will need detailed practical orientation as we discuss in the next section. Some co-ordinators make 'sample contracts' or copies of previous learners' contracts available for participants to study and critique before they try to draft their own. This prevents learners from having to 're-invent the wheel', and does not seem to decrease learners' creativity. *(Caffarella, 1983:9; Knowles, 1986:xii, 9, 33-6, 59; Richardson, 1987:203-4; Whittaker, 1984:38)*

Inadequate orientation of co-ordinators

This is perhaps the most commonly mentioned barrier to SDL, and a major reason for our work on this book. *(Beare, 1985:77; Boud, 1981a:17; 1981b:28; Bradley, 1975:71-4; Buzzell & Roman, 1981:135; Caffarella, 1983:26; Cornwall, 1988:246-8; Cowan, 1988:192; Griffin, 1977:16; Knowles, 1975:19-21, 31-8; 1980:43-58; 1986:47; Lehmann, 1975:136; Lindquist, 1975:89; Powell, 1981:205-7; 1988:117-8; Richardson, 1987:205; Rogers, 1983:61; Shelton, 1981:175-7; Tompkins & McGraw, 1988:183; Tough, 1967:12, 30)*

Most critics of contract learning probably fear the student who will try to 'get away with' as little work as possible. While it is possible that some learners may try to abuse the system – as many do in TDL courses – this should not be a major reason for rejecting contract learning. The opposite extreme may be a far more serious problem. Learners often get so enthusiastic about their contracts, and feel so motivated to extend themselves, that they undertake to do far more than would have been required of them in a TDL course. The facilitator must tactfully advise learners to limit their contracts, because a problem will almost inevitably arise later when they are unable to meet the unrealistically high standards they initially set for themselves (see Chapter 6). *(Henderson & Hyre, 1979:73; Rogers, 1983:62-5; Shelton, 1981:171)*

Course co-ordinators 'advising' learners to cut back on over-ambitious plans raises the major issue of control that Griffin (1977:14) and Jones (1982:168) mention. Negotiating for acceptance of a learning agreement is precisely that: a process of negotiation. If co-ordinators are honest, they will admit that in most situations, the learner is not in the strongest bargaining position. The potential exists for educators to subvert this process, to take control and pressure learners to meet the educator's purposes rather than their own. Lehmann (1975:129) quotes some depressing examples of how this can be done. In our own work, even when we thought we were very sensitive about not taking control away from learners, a few of them said that in retrospect they felt that 'their' learning agreements were more like 'ours'. In orientating ourselves as SDL co-ordinators, we must get clear that learning agreements are to be used as educational aids (for both learners and ourselves, as we argued earlier), not a means for us subtly to maintain control. Some educators, on the other hand, may hold back too much – failing to provide any support or assistance to learners in the mistaken belief that SDL implies solitary work. *(Brookfield, 1986:56-7, 86; Higgs et al, 1985:11; Tompkins & McGraw, 1988:178-80)*

Another aspect of co-ordinator orientation concerns administration of contract learning. It is more complex to administer than TDL. Facilitators need to be given adequate time to cope, and helped to develop efficient administrative systems consistent with the principles of SDL (see Chapter 9).

Learners may become too individualistic

Designing and working on an individual curriculum may cause some learners to lose the ability to compromise and to accommodate others in subsequent situations, or at least not to develop these abilities to the same extent they would have done in a less individualized learning situation. If development of inter-personal skills is a major priority, contract learning must make adequate provision for learners to interact and improve their skills in group settings. *(Candy, 1987:163-5; Knowles, 1986:112; Lehmann, 1975:134; Potts, 1988:149)*

No conclusive evidence about the value of contract learning

There is still a gap in the literature concerning evaluation of contract learning, which has only been used in the last decade or so. The few available evaluative studies are methodologically weak. However, while it is important to recognize that much of the literature about contract learning is still inspirational, it is also true that most other educational strategies have never been rigidly 'tested' or formally evaluated either. *(Caffarella, 1983; Caffarella & Caffarella, 1986; Kasworm, 1983; Whittaker, 1984)*

Two authors (Lehmann, 1975:134; Shelton, 1981:198) have commented that learners may lose the ability to do well in conventional examinations. But when the reason for the decline in conventional exam marks is given, it is evident that this should really be stated as a rationale for contract learning, not a limitation:

> ... we found that students (using contract learning) spent a great deal or almost all their time on analysis and synthesis, somewhat less time on evaluation and application, and relatively little time on memorization. (Lehmann, 1975:134)

Rogers (1983:52, 67-8), Cowan (1988:203), and Ferrier et al (1988:170) on the other hand, quote cases where contract and independent study learners in fact excelled in a conventional examination.

One of us recently completed doctoral research (Hammond, 1988) which showed that contract learners became more effective and socially conscious educators than people doing conventional courses.

Summary Of Research Results About Contract Learning Versus Conventional Courses

Twelve participants on the first Diploma in Primary Health Care (Education) course offered at the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa, used learning agreements to direct their own learning. They were all primary healthcare workers (eight nurses and four doctors) learning to improve their educational skills. Three control groups were monitored during the two-year period of the course. The first consisted of 33 students doing a full-time TDL course in nursing education. The second included 81 students doing a part-time, distance nursing education course. The third comprised 21 people who were also primary healthcare educators (nurses and doctors) but who were not doing the Diploma in Primary Health Care (Education). A variety of research instruments and methods was used to follow the progress of all these research participants over two years.

Response rates during the pre-course measurement phase were 92, 39, 81 and 71 per cent respectively. At mid-course, these figures were 92, 50, and 87 per cent for the first three groups. The primary healthcare educator control group were not asked to participate at this stage. At the end of the course, response rates were 83, 97, 86 and 71 per cent respectively. End-course comparisons between the few (39 and 50 per cent) full-time students who responded during the pre- and mid-course phases and their peers who responded at the end showed that there were no significant differences between early responders and non-responders. So despite the poor initial response rates for this control group, some confidence can be placed in the results.

Major research findings were as follows:

- The contract learners learned more of the educational knowledge they need to function effectively than other research participants.
- The contract learners mastered more of the skills they need to function effectively as educators than others.
- The contract learners developed more progressive attitudes than others.
- The contract learners analyse their situations and respond to them with insight more than others.
- The contract learners became more skilled in curriculum design than others.
- The contract learners and part-time students coped with and enjoyed their studies more than the full-time students.
- The contract and part-time learners felt more 'self-actualized' than the full-time students.
- No significant differences with respect to the development of participants' self-concepts were found.
- The contract and part-time students found their courses to be more progressive and the learning climates to be more liberating than the full-time students.
- The contract learners experienced their course to be more flexibly administered than the other students.
- The contract learners felt less competitive towards their fellow-learners than others.
- The contract learners valued the contributions of their fellow-learners more than the other students did.
- The contract learners showed evidence of more open ideas about the roles of learners and teachers than other study participants.

Did you think of any other potential problems of implementing contract learning? Once again, if you are more interested in group contracting, you may want to summarize the potential problems of that approach in a separate list. Before considering strategies to introduce contract learning in your situation, you may want to review your learning so far.

Periodic Review

1. How would you explain what a learning contract is to a colleague who had never heard of it?
2. Now, assume that this colleague objects to the idea of learning contracts because she feels that using learning objectives in education is 'undemocratic'. How would you respond to that?
3. Briefly list the major arguments for and against the use of learning objectives, and then summarize your own opinion about whether the advantages

outweigh the disadvantages or vice versa. Remember to consider teacher-set versus learner-set objectives as part of this issue.

4. What factors would you consider in deciding whether individual or group contracting would be more appropriate in the course you co-ordinate? (We provide our ideas for you to consider below.)

For all the reasons we raised in the section about advantages of learning agreements, we see individual contracting as preferable, provided that some group work is included and precautions are taken to prevent the problem of individualism discussed above. Group contracting, on the other hand, is an excellent compromise design for use in large groups where the co-ordinator cannot cope with negotiation of individual curricula (but see Knowles [1986:45] and Stephenson [1988:224-6] – both argue that contracting and independent study can be implemented with the same staff:student ratios as TDL). Group contracting may also be considered when members of the learning group have very similar past experiences and interests and where they are working together in circumstances which allow for frequent contact between and negotiation among learners (eg on a full-time, residential course).

5. What are some of the major reasons put forward by educators in favour of using contract learning? In each case, do you agree or disagree with their reasoning, and why?
6. What are the major potential problems of using contract learning? To prepare your thoughts for the next section, try to think of ways you could overcome or prevent each problem you list.
7. If you and the learners have already analysed your situations (Chapter 2), compiled a detailed competency profile (Chapter 3), and if they have then used self-assessment (Chapter 4), is it not possible for them to use their self-assessments to guide their learning instead of having to write a detailed agreement? (We provide our ideas below.)

In our own work, we initially wondered whether it was really necessary for participants to go to all the trouble of designing a learning agreement when they had such a detailed competency profile to work from. Could people not simply design a time plan to specify deadlines for having mastered different sections of the competency profile and use that as their personal curriculum? This idea seemed especially tempting while we were still inexperienced as co-ordinators of self-directed learning, and when we saw how most learners initially had to struggle to draft their learning agreements. However, we soon realized that if this 'short-cut' had been taken, both learners and ourselves as co-ordinators would have faced serious problems as the course progressed. Who would decide what evidence of accomplishment was appropriate? Whose evaluation criteria would have been used to evaluate the evidence? At what stage would the reasonableness of these criteria be negotiated between the learner and the co-ordinator? What assurance would there be that adequate learning resources were being used? We believe that the tendency would have been for control over the learning process to revert to ourselves as co-ordinators, thus cancelling out the potential benefits of SDL.

In summary, the learning agreement helps ensure that learners maintain greater control of their learning, while simultaneously providing protection to the accreditor. Apart from these reasons for using learning agreements, having seen how creatively course participants managed to combine various aspects of the competency profile into single objectives, and how their ability to express themselves – both in writing and verbally – improved through the negotiating process, we believe that exclusion of the learning agreement drafting phase would have been a serious mistake.

8. There are clearly both advantages and disadvantages of using learning contracts. Having critically considered both, what is your opinion now and why?

Strategies To Introduce Contract Learning

Our objective here is to answer the final question raised in the overview: How can we prepare learners to draft their own learning agreements? If you completed the periodic review above, you will already have some ideas about how to introduce learning agreements while avoiding many of the potential limitations of this approach. If not, you may want to take some time now to generate your own ideas before reading further.

Pre-Course Preparation

Pre-course notification (eg in course brochures) about learning agreements helps prepare learners to expect something different, and decreases the possibility of learner rejection of the whole idea of contract learning. Higgs's (1988:44-5) idea of asking learners to assess their 'readiness for SDL' may also be useful at this early stage.

During Initial Stages Of The Course

Theoretical orientation and resources

As we have said, learners unfamiliar with SDL need orientation. Analysing the situation, generating a competency profile and doing self-assessment (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4) helps prepare learners for designing their own curricula or learning agreements. The importance of these prior steps cannot be over-emphasized. Too many learners are expected to draft learning agreements with no rational basis for setting goals and prioritizing learning needs. Cowan (1988:192-7) describes what can go wrong when this happens. In addition, we recommend that the rationale for and limitations of learning agreements be openly discussed with learners. They should be reassured that the approach is used internationally, and that they are not guinea-pigs in some irresponsible experiment of yours.

Learners also need orientation about setting learning objectives. We mistakenly assumed that learners would master this skill quickly, and did not provide special resources for them. Having seen how much unnecessary frustration was caused as a result, we now provide an introductory resource like the one in Appendix 4. Providing access to sample learning agreements is emerging as another important part of learner orientation.

Reflections On The Phase During Which Participants Drafted Learning Objectives

In informal conversations with participants during the time set aside for drafting learning objectives, we sometimes heard comments bordering on despair. Yet there was also a strange optimism and determination to see the process through. As one participant said, the work late at night was like the night before a major examination at the end of a course – not at the start of a course! From what we observed, there was a lot of informal small group work, with people sitting together, sharing books, asking for help and feedback from each other, and sometimes joking about how if they'd known what they were letting themselves in for, they would never have enrolled!

It is not easy for participants going through the transition from teacher- to self-directed learning. On reflection, however, this phase could have been less stressful if specially designed resources about learning objectives (see Appendix 4, for example) had been made available in advance. Too much energy was being spent trying to write a learning objective which contained all the necessary elements, so too little was left for creative and critical thinking about the planning of the curriculum as a whole.

Provide opportunities to practise new skills

Any new skill requires practice before mastery is achieved, and drafting a learning agreement is no exception. If the initial phrasing of objectives and receiving of feedback is done in learning pairs, participants feel more confident and open to learning from their mistakes than if they struggle alone. Thereafter, they can draft a preliminary learning agreement with more confidence, and the co-ordinator or some more experienced learners should be available to give immediate feedback and encouragement. *(Brookfield, 1986:83; Caffarella 1983:9)*

Encourage learners to draft a preliminary learning agreement

Having gained experience at setting objectives, and having received detailed feedback, learners can combine their objectives in a 'preliminary learning agreement' (PLA), and draft a time plan stating which objectives will be achieved by when. This process can be extremely stressful. Participants may feel overwhelmed: working through all the competencies they identified as learning needs in the self-assessment process; condensing them into concisely phrased objectives; and prioritizing these so that the most important ones will be achieved by the end of the course. In addition, if they have assessed themselves as competent in certain core areas, they need to think of ways to provide 'evidence of competency' so that their existing competencies can be formally validated.

First drafts of PLAs will almost certainly need extensive revision. This is normal, and learners should be reassured in advance about the need to redraft. Knowles (1986:37) recommends that peers review each other's contracts before asking the co-ordinator for feedback: he finds that they are often blunter in their comments than he would want to be, and his work is decreased because the contracts he sees are of better quality than they were before peer review. He also provides a checklist for learners to get feedback about their early drafts from colleagues and mentors (Knowles, 1986:31-2).

Encourage learners to draft a 'limited agreement' as well

We recommend that participants pull together the objectives from their PLAs which have deadlines set for the near future, and consider these to make up a short-term 'limited agreement'. Progress after a short while can then be reviewed with each learner, and some early lessons (eg about time management, unfeasible objectives, and so on) can be drawn before the final learning agreement (FLA) is negotiated.

Negotiate for acceptance of the PLA and 'limited agreement'

In contract learning, learners and co-ordinators need to agree on what constitutes a reasonable learning plan. As we have said before, negotiation commonly involves the co-ordinator urging learners to cut back on their early, over-ambitious plans.

Be Prepared For Possessive Learners!

In our experience, learners become very possessive of their learning agreements at an early stage, and may not take kindly to well-meaning advice from others. For example, when we told a participant we thought she was taking on far too much work, she replied: 'These are my objectives and I am feeling very committed to them, so please don't tell me to cut down on anything'. While we were delighted with her commitment at the time, it soon became evident that she would not be able to meet all her deadlines, and management of the learning agreement (see Chapter 6) became a problem for her.

Another important issue at this stage concerns the possibility of the co-ordinator taking control over the learning agreement, as we discussed above. At the opposite extreme, inexperienced co-ordinators may make the same mistake we initially did. We were so concerned about not subverting the delicate new balance of power that we left participants 'on their own' and let the phase of drafting learning agreements continue for much longer than was productive – several months in some cases. As Davie (1987:204) points out, too much drafting and re-drafting can put learners off the whole process. Slightly more guidance (for example, a handout like the one in Appendix 4), more freely offered, would have enabled learners to complete their PLAs much sooner.

Provide follow-up and support until the final learning agreement (FLA) is accepted

We distinguish between a preliminary and a final learning agreement so that learners are mentally prepared for making many changes to their early drafts as they gain experience and confidence. In full-time courses, support is relatively easy to provide in face-to-face consultations, and learners have each other to consult as well. In distance learning situations, correspondence between learners and co-ordinators is necessary. Once we as co-ordinators have accepted the terms specified in a FLA, we write a letter confirming this and congratulating the learner on her/his achievement so far. It is important to have something in writing, both for our own records, and for the learner's.

Later During The Course

Re-negotiate the terms of the FLA when necessary

The FLA must remain flexible and responsive to learners' changing needs and priorities, provided that any changes are openly negotiated between the learner and course co-ordinator. We often found that participants submitted such extensive evidence that they provided 'evidence of accomplishment' for two or three objectives in a single submission. In such cases, we suggested that they not submit further evidence, but move on to other objectives instead.

Re-evaluate the FLA after a period

While re-negotiation of small aspects of the contract is important, a different process – re-evaluation after some months – would also benefit learners. Priorities change as new learning occurs. Learners can also draw on recent experience and new insights to improve their agreements. For example, when the agreement was initially compiled, the learner may not have been aware of a whole range of learning resources, or may have had limited ideas about what would constitute appropriate evidence of accomplishment and so on. It is therefore important to build in to the structure of the course a formal re-evaluation of the original agreement, so that learners and co-ordinators expect that the FLA may and probably should change. Failing that, it may become restrictive and unchallenging.

Feedback from the learners with whom we have worked and our own experience as self-directed learners certainly supports what many authors say about the phase of drafting learning agreements: it is probably the greatest challenge facing inexperienced self-directed learners. That being the case, it is really important to prepare and support learners before and during the drafting process. Did you think of other strategies you could use to introduce learning agreements in your work?

Periodic Review

1. Which of the strategies listed above, and any others you have added to the list, would you use if you wanted to help learners draft individual learning agreements? Why would you omit those not included on your list?
2. If you decided to use group contracting, which strategies would be appropriate to orientate the learning group, and why?

Practical Exercises

Please read through these suggested exercises and decide which, if any, would be useful to you if you are thinking of introducing contract learning. Alternatively, you may have thought of more relevant exercises to complete.

1. Put yourself through the same process that you expect learners to cope with: look back at your ratings in the self-assessment exercise at the start of this (or any other) chapter, and use your major identified learning needs to phrase some detailed learning objectives. (Appendix 4 may be helpful if you are not yet experienced in writing objectives, and Knowles [1986:1-37] opens his book *Using Learning Contracts* with a detailed exercise designed to help readers through the process of drafting their own agreement.)
2. Now, evaluate each objective critically, using the same criteria that you will use when you give feedback to learners. Once again, you may find Appendix 4 helpful to highlight common errors.
3. If possible, ask a colleague who is experienced in using learning objectives to give you feedback. (So often, 'fresh eyes' will notice problems that you have glossed over.)
4. If necessary, re-draft your objectives, and then get some more practice by setting objectives for another aspect of SDL co-ordination by referring to the self-assessment exercise in another chapter.
5. Ask sympathetic colleagues to write some objectives themselves, so you can practise giving honest but tactful and encouraging feedback. Then ask them for feedback on your skills at giving feedback.
6. Estimate how much time would be needed to adequately orientate learners and for them to draft a PLA. Then, how long would you need for giving them feedback on their drafts? And for them to produce a FLA? (The investment of time initially may seem great. But remember that participants will be struggling to gain control of their own learning now, and they will have these skills for the rest of their lives. If that seems an important goal to achieve, it is surely worth the initial investment.)
7. You are co-ordinating a course with ten participants, and everyone has negotiated for acceptance of a PLA except one person, Thandi. She keeps promising that she will soon complete her agreement, but seems to have a

'mental block' about it. One of Thandi's friends jokes that Thandi is 'terrified' of objectives. How would you try to help her?

8. In the same group, Gladys has drafted an excellent PLA. She has clearly understood all the principles involved, but you are concerned that she is taking on much too much to achieve in one year. In an individual consultation, you compliment her on her work, but caution that it seems too ambitious and suggest that she leave out some of the objectives altogether. She gets defensive and says that she will complete it all. What is your responsibility as course co-ordinator at this stage? How could you help her cut back without taking control from her? How could this be done without making her resentful or feeling that you do not have faith in her abilities? If possible, ask a friend or colleague to role-play Gladys so that you can practise dealing with difficult situations like this.

Conclusion

If the length of a chapter indicates something of the relative complexity and importance of the content, then it's clear that we consider the phase of helping learners draft their own learning agreements to be a crucial one in the critical SDL process. In our early attempts at co-ordinating SDL we made mistakes – reflected on throughout this chapter – which resulted in learners suffering unnecessarily as they struggled to draft agreements. Perhaps the learners with whom you work will have a less stressful – but equally challenging – time.

If you have found the process of self-assessment at the start of a chapter and then re-assessment afterwards to be helpful, then please refer back to the self-assessment exercise now and identify any learning needs about learning agreements that you may still have. The resources listed throughout this chapter should be useful as you plan to meet these needs.

The process of designing a personal curriculum in the form of a learning agreement is a major challenge to learners, whether they are doing so as individuals or as a group. But designing a learning agreement is only a start. The next challenge facing self-directed learners is to effectively manage their own learning, as we discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter 6

Self-Management Of Learning

We found it easy to let go control of deciding what would be learned and how learning would be evaluated. What was not so easy was to let go control of the management of learning: to decide jointly with learners how we would all learn, rather than the group waiting for us to take the lead with our bag of educational tricks. Initially, we just didn't trust that group members could decide how best they should learn. (Det Prozesky, personal communication)

Chapter Preview

Educators are trained to select and use appropriate teaching methods and media. We pride ourselves on being able to use the 'tricks of the trade', to communicate clearly, to educate effectively. In the previous chapter we discussed how self-directed learning (SDL) co-ordinators have to share control over the curriculum design process. Now, we go further. To facilitate critical SDL, we have to return control over the management of learning to those who are doing the learning. And we have to recognize that learners will initially need orientation, encouragement and trust as they take over this unfamiliar process. Our role is to support them as they learn the skills they need to become effective managers of their own learning. Our reward is knowing that these skills will help them, not just now, but in all their future learning as well. Reflection is one strategy we mention here as part of the self-management process, but because it is often neglected by educators and learners, we have included a separate chapter about it following this one.

The main questions we hope to answer in this chapter are:

- What is self-management of learning?
- What are the reasons for and problems with encouraging self-management of learning?
- Finally, what strategies can we use to help learners improve self-management?

Self-Assessment

Please use the same 1-5 rating scale we have previously recommended where 1 means that you feel very unsure of your competency, and 5 means that you feel competent and/or confident. We suggest that you use the first column now before you read further. Depending on your ratings, you may want to read selected sections of this chapter. After doing so, you could re-assess yourself (using the second column here) to see how much *you feel you have learned. If you decide to read further, perhaps using some of the resources we refer to, you could then assess yourself a third time at that stage.*

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

- define self-management
- critically consider the rationale for and limitations of self-management and help learners to do the same
- use some or all of the following strategies to encourage and support self-management:
  - warn learners about my expectations that they will manage their own learning
  - help learners improve their learning, study, and time-management skills
  - discuss the psychological phases that self-directed learners usually pass through so that they can anticipate, recognize and cope with these emotions in themselves
  - provide appropriate theoretical and administrative orientation to help learners cope with self-management
  - help learners set realistic targets for themselves
  - encourage formation of learning partnerships and use of a variety of human resources
  - ensure access to a library, computer-assisted learning and other facilities as necessary
  - distribute learning resources (eg handouts, programmed texts, booklists) when appropriate
  - encourage reflection on and self-evaluation of learning and the self-management process
  - provide opportunities to practise self-management of learning (eg by asking people to design an initial 'limited contract' for the first few weeks or months and seeing where the problems in self-management lie for each individual) (see Chapter 5)
  - discuss how learners and co-ordinators can best 'keep track' of the learning and progress of self-directed learners (see Chapter 8)

My additional ideas about self-management:

Total:

Overview: Self-Management Of Learning

What Is Self-Management Of Learning?

What do you understand by the term self-management of learning?

In a conventional programme, decisions about what, how, where and when learning will occur are all made by educators (or other authorities). Learners are excluded from decisions about both the content and the processes of learning. They are perceived as relatively passive, subservient recipients in a process controlled by others. In self-directed learning (SDL), on the other hand, conventional power relations are changed. Learners and educators share control. The steps described in previous chapters (building a co-operative learning climate, analysing the situation, generating a competency profile, assessing learning needs and drafting a learning agreement) help learners take greater control of the content of their learning. With self-management, learners take control of the learning process as well. In other words, individuals (or groups of learners if group contracting – see Chapter 5 – is used) decide how, where and when to learn the content they have identified as important. As Det Prozesky reflects in the opening quotation of this chapter, this is not always easy for co-ordinators. *(Dewey, 1938:77-8; Freire, 1970a:57-74; Illich, 1970; Werner & Bower, 1982:1.1-1.30)*

So self-management of learning occurs when learners are in control of the process(es) of their own learning. But self-management does not mean managing alone, in isolation. Just as learning agreements are designed by learners in consultation with others (peers, external resource people, and the course co-ordinator), so self-management implies the learner is in control, but free to consult with others. A learner may even choose to attend a conventional course of lectures if that seems the most appropriate strategy to learn a particular aspect. *(Higgs, 1988:48-9; Tough, 1981:23)*

Did you think of any other important aspects which we have not mentioned?

Why Encourage Self-Management Of Learning?

Why do you think educators should encourage self-management of learning?

Self-management is consistent with the philosophy of SDL

A major objective of SDL is that learners become more autonomous and confident about coping with challenges. It is therefore philosophically consistent for a co-ordinator to involve learners in designing their own learning plans (Chapters 2-5), and then to encourage them to manage their own learning as well.

Self-management takes account of individual differences

Different learners have different learning styles, paces, interests, motivations and so on. People's readiness to learn and other factors will affect how and when they can 'make meaning' for themselves. For all these reasons, having learners control and manage their own learning takes due account of the individual differences in a learning group. *(Fransson, 1977; Pohl, 1978:27-8; Tough, 1981:11)*

Self-management prepares learners for continuing learning

Once learners leave a course, whether it is self- or teacher-directed, they are expected to continue learning throughout their lives. The steps in SDL discussed in previous chapters help people to prepare for making decisions about what needs to be learned in continuing learning programmes. Self-management would, in addition, prepare them to manage their continuing learning more effectively. *(Tough, 1981:15)*

Did you think of other reasons for encouraging self-management of learning?

Potential Problems Of Self-Management

What problems may occur in the process of encouraging learners to take control of their own learning processes?

Inadequate orientation of learners

Learners accustomed to TDL may have no experience of self-management of learning, so it may initially be intimidating. They need detailed theoretical, administrative, and practical orientation (see next section). Some learners may be so enthusiastic about their learning agreements that they set idealistic standards and unattainable targets as we discussed in Chapter 5. The disillusionment that follows when they try to manage their 'unmanageable' learning can then be severe. *(Shelton, 1981:171)*

Inadequate access to learning resources

Self-management must be made feasible for learners. They need easy access to relevant and appropriate learning resources if they are to achieve their self-set learning objectives. On distance-learning courses especially, participants may be from remote places with no library facilities and other learning resources (including people to consult).

> **Learning Resources In Rural Areas: Comment By Det Prozesky**
>
> SDL 'in the bush' presents major problems when access to materials and resource people is very limited. Learners' enthusiasm grinds down. Sometimes, third rate, inaccurate information is taken as truth because there is nothing better with which to compare it. Our village health worker-level learners need better access to books (in the vernacular), periodicals, lending libraries, visual aids, continuing education programmes, even radio....

Learners may lack self-discipline

Some learners may pursue their interests instead of meeting their identified learning needs. Others may have the ability to manage their learning, but lack the motivation, commitment or self-discipline to do so effectively. This problem is, of course, not unique to self-directed courses. *(Fox & Harvill, 1984:275; Tough, 1981:10)*

Educators may fail to support self-managed learning

Co-ordinators need to recognize that learners who are expected to manage their own learning will need different types of emotional and technical support at different times (see Boud, 1987:232-3). Some educators may pay lip-service to self-management, but may still secretly believe that 'real learning' can only occur when learners are taught. Learners will be quick to sense the contradiction, and may themselves undervalue any self-managed learning they do. The comments below reflect on our initial failure to recognize the value of self-managed learning in a part-time, self-directed course which included occasional residential blocks and a major distance-learning component.

> **Undervaluing Self-Managed Learning**
>
> Looking back, we saw that the course brochure focused much more on what would happen during the residential blocks than on how learners would be expected to manage their learning during the major part of the course when they were working on their own at a distance. When we compiled the brochure, we still subconsciously thought that the most important part of the course would be the limited periods when the group was assembled, and perhaps more ominously, when they would be directly 'under our influence'. We were still under the ancient misconception that learning – or at least significant learning – only occurs under the direct guidance of an educator. It is worrying to think that our initial attitude may have been communicated to participants, and that they thought of 'the course' as consisting mainly of the short residential periods, undervaluing their self-managed distance learning as a result.

Did you think of other problems you might face if you implement self-management of learning in your setting? Self-management is one of the most neglected aspects in the SDL literature, as is evident from the limited references in this chapter. Yet it is a crucial phase of the SDL process, and one which needs urgent attention by co-ordinators so that learners can be optimally prepared to take control over the process of their own learning. In the next section, following a review, we suggest strategies which you can consider using to prepare and support learners.

Periodic Review

1. A colleague sees you reading this chapter about self-management of learning and asks you what is meant by the term. How would you explain it to her?
2. 'Self-management' is perhaps the most appropriate term to use if learners are working individually on their own learning agreements. If group contracting

(see Chapter 5) were being used, however, can you think of a more relevant term? We include our ideas below.

Perhaps the terms 'learner-management', 'group-management' or 'peer-management' would be more appropriate?

3. Which of the rationales for self-management which we mentioned or you added would be most convincing to your colleagues?
4. Which potential problems we listed or you added would be most likely to affect the learners with whom you work? How might you prevent or overcome these problems?

Helping Learners Manage Their Learning

In this section, the final major question raised in the overview is addressed: what strategies can we use to improve self-management of learning? It is in this sphere that the existing SDL literature is particularly limited, so we should all be prepared to experiment, innovate, and ask learners with whom we work for their feedback and ideas. What strategies can you think of that would help learners to take control of their learning processes? (Your answer to question 4 in the periodic review above should be useful here.)

Pre-Course Preparation

Learners should be notified in advance (eg in a course brochure) that they will be expected to manage their own learning, and that you as the co-ordinator believe that self-managed learning is both essential and very significant. If pre-course notification is not possible for some reason, then one of the first sessions together should deal with this.

Helping Learners During The Course

Theoretical orientation

Learners may need theoretical orientation about how to improve study skills (such as reading and note-taking skills), library skills, reporting skills and the like. Learning how to manage study time effectively is also crucial. *(Buzan, 1982; Candy et al, 1985:101-2; Lakein, 1973; Main, 1985:91; Ugbolue et al, 1987:8-10)*

Recently, the technical focus of some 'study skills' proponents has been criticized. The fear is that we only teach learners how to submit themselves to teaching, and thus limit them to superficial rote-learning. Some researchers are now focusing more on 'learning strategies', 'approaches to learning', 'learning skills' and 'learning contexts'. *(Biggs, 1987; Kriel, 1987:10-24; Main, 1985; Marton & Saljo, 1976)*

Another aspect of theoretical orientation could concern the 'self-education crisis'. Armstrong et al (1985:77) hypothesize that self-directed learners experience initial ecstasy about their new-found freedom, but then get shocked when they realize how much work there is to be done. Some learners become hostile or depressed, while others emerge with realism and commitment. Taylor (1987) studied self-directed university students and developed a model of the phases they tend to experience, including initial disorientation characterized by 'confusion, anxiety and tension, a crisis of confidence, and withdrawal from others'. Perhaps some insight into how other self-directed learners have reacted would help participants understand and cope with their own emotional responses to SDL.

Administrative orientation

An error we initially made was to focus unduly on the curriculum design phase, leaving little time to help participants think ahead and ask: how am I going to use my learning agreement and time plan (see Chapter 5) on a weekly basis to manage my learning efficiently? A group discussion or individual consultation about this can be an important aid for learners. The reflections below about some other omissions we have made may be of interest to you.

Reflections About Inadequate Administrative Orientation Of Learners

We initially took certain things for granted because of our own relatively privileged educational backgrounds. For example, we overlooked the fact that some participants could not initially cope with basic management skills such as how to use a diary, budget time, file resources accessibly, set priorities and so on. For some, the use of staples, folders, files, methods of highlighting text and so on were new skills. With hindsight, we should have designed a 'self-management exercise' in which these basic skills were evaluated, and then offered practice sessions for those who required them right at the start of the course.

In addition to these oversights, when the course began we had not yet devised a formal system to 'keep track' of individual progress as participants followed their learning plans. The system we eventually found most useful, discussed in Chapter 8, soon evolved. The error at that stage was that we did not formally discuss this system with participants so that they could see how up-to-date records of their individual progress were being kept. The informal discussions during individual consultations were not sufficient for many people to realize that they could use similar strategies to keep track of their own progress as self-directed learners. Given that a major part of effective self-management of learning depends on effective self-monitoring and self-evaluation (see later in this section), this was a serious omission.

Help learners set realistic targets

This was discussed in Chapter 5, but we mention it again here because the targets and deadlines set by learners will directly affect their success or failure at self-management. In our experience, most self-directed learners initially set unrealistically high standards and unfeasible deadlines. Then, when these cannot be met, disillusionment for both participants and co-ordinators follows. As we discussed in Chapter 5, a 'limited agreement' for the first few weeks or months of the course would isolate problems of unfeasible targets, inadequate learning resources, poor time management and so on, so that individual problems can be addressed at an early stage.

Encourage learning partnerships and collaborative work

A learning partnership is a peer relationship whose main objective is learning. *(Robinson et al, 1985: Saberton, 1985)*

> We found that the learning process was much less painful when shared with a learning partner.... (O)ur partnership promoted creative learning, provided mutual support through encouragement, increased our energy levels and ensured that the task was successfully accomplished. (Saberton, 1985:3)

The role of collaborative work in SDL has been grossly undervalued according to Taylor (1987), whose research indicates that at some phases of the SDL process (eg during exploration and later when learners need to share new insights and test out their 'understandability'), learners have a very strong need for collaboration and sharing. Learning partnerships – including those with course co-ordinators – could help meet this need. Distance learners could write to or telephone each other as well as their course co-ordinators.

> ***Reflections On Types Of Learning Partnerships***
>
> We distinguished between two types of learning partners in the part-time course we co-ordinated. The first involved 'home-based partners'. We recommended that at least two health workers from the same hospital apply to do the course together, so that each would have a 'home-based partner' immediately available for discussions, support and sharing ideas during distance-learning periods. We hoped that they might help each other meet self-set deadlines, keep working through the inevitable periods of demotivation, and be sounding boards for each other as they reflected on their learning experiences. Feedback from participants at the end of their course showed that most people had worked together with their home-based partners, and had found this to be useful.
>
> However, given that participants may have more in common with a peer from a distant centre, we also suggested building 'distance-learning partnerships'. The initiative for forming, maintaining and ending these partnerships was taken by the participants themselves. We hoped that these partnerships would be both emotionally and intellectually satisfying for learners. Feedback at the end of the course indicated that this strategy had not been very effectively used by most participants. It obviously takes more effort to maintain contact with people who are far away, and participants knew that they would be able to re-establish contact with each other during the regular residential blocks. Perhaps distance partnerships would be better used in a course with little or no residential time?

Apart from learning partners, can you think of other people who could act as human resources to self-directed learners?

Tough (1981:29-32) recommends the use of several human resources such as family members, friends, colleagues, librarians and professional educators. Another obvious potential human resource is the course co-ordinator of an accredited course, or an informal facilitator or mentor. A lot depends on the quality of the interaction. At worst, mentors may be directive, judgemental, or unsupportive. At best, they may be genuine learning partners. *(Brown & Martin, 1987:67; Davies, 1983:13; Kilcullen, 1985:31; Lehmann, 1975:130; Rogers, 1983:46, 48,155; Tough, 1981:15)*

We use regular individual consultations with learners to stay in touch and to strengthen personal relationships with them. Feedback from learners has been extremely positive, and many of the educators with whom we have worked now use individual consultations in turn, as the extracts below illustrate. Mankuba Ramalepe works at the Ithuseng Community Health Centre in Lenyenye, South Africa. One of her village-based projects is to train village health workers.

> ***Comment About Individual Consultations By Mankuba Ramalepe***
>
> The women I am working with as village health worker trainees like the individual consultations very much. I think they feel special and cared for as individuals, accepted, with all their problems and weaknesses. The consultations are time-consuming, but I recommend that all adult educators use them.

Gcina Radebe is a PHC nurse and educator working in South Africa:

> ***Prepare Learners Beforehand: A Caution From Gcina Radebe***
>
> I initiated individual consultations with the nurses after experiencing the positive effects of such consultations during the course I did. But a problem emerged: the purposes of the consultations had not been fully discussed beforehand, and so the first few learners came in with unnecessary fears. The only similar thing they had experienced was being sent to the principal's office for a reprimand at school or in nursing college! From this misunderstanding, I have learned to take time to explain exactly what we as educators expect from the consultations, and to give learners a chance to think of how they can use the consultations to best advantage as well.

Assist with material learning resources

One way of helping learners to manage their own learning at their own pace is to make appropriate resources available to them. Reading lists, handouts, reprints of articles, programmed texts, audio tapes, videos, slide-tape shows, movies, and computer programs could all be used for this purpose, provided that these are clearly offered as resources (which the learner may or may not choose to use) and not 'prescriptions'. As Boud (1987:235-6) says, co-ordinating SDL does not mean you can never provide suggestions or information.

Other material resources we have used include a six-monthly 'progress report' summarizing our perceptions of each learner's progress. We hoped that these would act as learning resources by re-motivating participants and alerting them to potential problem areas. The written feedback we sent to participants about the 'evidence of accomplishment' they submitted could also be viewed as a learning resource. We tried to be as honest yet as motivating as possible in our feedback.

Encourage reflection on and self-evaluation of learning and self-management

Chapter 7 deals with reflection on learning, and Chapter 8 with evaluation. We raise these issues here for two reasons. First, reflection on past learning can motivate learners and stimulate future learning, and as such aid self-management of learning. Second, unless learners regularly evaluate both the content and process of their learning, they may fail to diagnose self-management problems before so much time has passed that they feel too overwhelmed and disillusioned to continue. Griffin (1987) finds it useful to ask learners to reflect on what they have experienced as learners, and to 'name their own learning processes'. *(Boyd & Fales, 1983; Heron, 1988:85-6; Higgs, 1988:48, 52)*

Did you think of other strategies to encourage self-management?

Periodic Review

1. Our focus has been learners managing individual learning agreements. If you are implementing group contracting, which strategies would be useful, and which others would you need to include as well?
2. Some strategies are more appropriate for distance-learning courses, and others for residential courses. Depending on your situation, which strategies would you use to help learners become more effective at self-management?

Practical Exercises

The following practical exercises are suggested if you are thinking of encouraging self-management of learning in your own work. Alternatively, you may think of more appropriate exercises to complete.

1. Think of a learning project you have recently undertaken. (It could be work-related, or learning a new hobby, sport, or practical skill.) First, give yourself an honest rating of how successfully you think you managed your learning. Now, list all the things which helped you manage your learning, and all those which hindered you. Next, think of strategies you might have used to improve your self-management. Finally, if this reflection on your own experience as a learner has resulted in new insights, please go back and add new ideas to the relevant sections of this chapter.
2. What learning management problems are the learners with whom you work most likely to have? (For example, do any of them have language problems? Can they use a library effectively? Are the notes they take adequate for them to refer to later as learning resources? Do they know how to reference the work of authors they quote?) Now, having identified some of the problems learners are likely to have, plan a session to help them diagnose their own strengths and weaknesses in this regard. (Would a self-assessment instrument be appropriate?) Finally, think of how you could best help learners once they have identified their learning needs in the area of self-management. (Do you need to prepare new handouts? Perhaps some learners would need individual help, while others could work together on practical exercises. Maybe other resource people such as a librarian or study skills specialist could help?)

3. Draft a section for inclusion in your course brochure which introduces the idea of self-management. Ask some colleagues and learners for feedback on the draft, then re-draft if necessary.
4. Plan and schedule time for a group session in which you help learners think how they can use their learning agreements and time plans (see Chapter 5) to manage their learning. (Check that you don't just tell them what you think, but draw on their ideas as well.)
5. The concept of a learning partnership may be new to you, but you have probably worked with someone in an informal learning partnership at some stage of your life. Maybe you studied with a friend before tests and examinations, for example? Think of the situation in which the learners with whom you work find themselves. (Are they isolated from each other for much of the time, or do they all live together in a residence? Are they from similar or dissimilar backgrounds? Do they have many or few common interests?) Depending on the situation, their needs for learning partnerships will differ. Make some notes about suggestions you could offer for them to consider. For example, would you recommend that distance learners correspond with one or two co-learners? Or should they try to form a partnership with someone who is not doing the same course? Could a close friend or relative be the most appropriate learning partner for some people? Could you as course co-ordinator be a learning partner to some or all of the learners? Would some partners be good for some things (eg motivating people to meet their self-set deadlines), while being poor at other aspects (eg stimulating critical thought, giving honest feedback and so on)?
6. You are co-ordinating a self-directed university diploma course with 15 learners. One person, Jay, has not been meeting the terms of his learning agreement – some of his 'evidence of accomplishment' is now more than a month overdue. You plan to discuss this in an individual consultation tomorrow. How will you start the consultation? What questions will you ask? How can you ensure that Jay gets a chance to express any worries or personal problems that may be affecting his work? At the same time, how can you emphasize that it is not acceptable for a learning agreement to be changed without prior negotiation? (If you can, ask a colleague to role-play Jay so that you can get some real-life practice at handling a sensitive individual consultation.)

7. Now, imagine that you are starting the individual consultation with Jay. You have welcomed him and are busy getting the notes you made yesterday out of his file when he announces that he plans to resign from the course – he is not coping with self-directed learning, and wants to go and do a 'normal' diploma course instead. He says he is just not 'clever' enough to manage his own learning like all the others in the group who are doing so well. How would you handle this unexpected announcement? (Once again, if you can find someone to role-play Jay, and to give you feedback on how you deal with this problem, you will learn more.)
8. In the same group as Jay, another learner, Tina, has the opposite problem. She is excelling in every aspect. Her learning agreement was ambitious and creative, and the evidence of accomplishment that she has been submitting is far more detailed, analytical and innovative than you would expect from a learner at diploma level: this is degree-level work! How would you handle this situation? (Does your institution make provision for learners like Tina to 'leap-frog' into a degree programme even if her entry grades or previous qualifications were not 'up to standard'? If not, how could you lobby for learners like Tina, who only excel when given the freedom to learn that SDL provides?)

Conclusion

In the previous chapter we admitted that we had initially been sceptical about whether learners would really manage to draft their own learning agreements. The same was true about self-management. We often wondered, during the early days of the course: 'Will learners ever cope with managing their own learning? Won't they need us to teach them?' Once again, it was only as the course progressed and as learners (several of whom were like 'Tina' in the last practical exercise above) surpassed our most optimistic expectations that we relaxed and accepted the fact that most learners can indeed learn. If only more educators would give them the chance to do it. Watching initially hesitant and sceptical learners taking control of this process and growing more confident as they learned from their own and each other's mistakes was one of the most rewarding parts of our work co-ordinating SDL. Self-management is a hard-earned skill, but one which will be invaluable throughout learners' lives.

You may want to return to the self-assessment exercise at the start of this chapter to re-assess your learning needs now that you have worked through the issues raised here. Alternatively, you may want to move right on to the next chapter where we discuss reflection and learning.

Chapter 7

Reflection And Learning

> The act of knowing involves a dialectical movement which goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to a new action. (Freire, 1970b:13)

Chapter Preview

What a sad comment on modern educational systems that most learners neither value nor practise active, critical reflection. They are too busy studying to stop and think. Sadder still, many educators don't reflect either. They must be too busy 'teaching'.

In Chapter 2 we dealt with situation analysis and mentioned the link between that and critical reflection. Reflection is also a strategy which aids self-management of learning, as we discussed in the previous chapter, and one which often involves self-evaluation, which we deal with in the next chapter. However, because reflection is so often neglected by both educators and learners, and because it is a central strategy in critical self-directed learning (SDL), we deal with it in a separate chapter here.

The major questions guiding this chapter are:

- What is reflection?
- What are the reasons for encouraging reflection and the potential problems to avoid when doing so?
- Finally, what strategies can we use to encourage reflection?

Self-Assessment

Please assess your existing competencies now before you start working through the sections of this chapter which are relevant for you. After your reading, you may want to return and re-assess yourself (using the second column provided) to evaluate your learning. The third column could then be used at some future date if you decide to continue your inquiry into reflection, perhaps using some of the resources we refer to throughout. Please use a rating scale of 1-5 where 1 means that you need a lot of improvement, and 5 means that you feel very competent and/or confident.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

- define reflection ☐ ☐ ☐
- critically consider the types and purposes of reflection ☐ ☐ ☐
- debate the rationale for and potential limitations of encouraging reflection ☐ ☐ ☐
- facilitate sessions to motivate learners to reflect on their experience ☐ ☐ ☐
- use some or all of the following strategies to promote critical reflection: ☐ ☐ ☐
  - writing ☐ ☐ ☐
  - discussion ☐ ☐ ☐
  - visual and other aids to reflection ☐ ☐ ☐
  - asking learners to evaluate their 'reflectiveness' ☐ ☐ ☐

My additional ideas about reflection: ☐ ☐ ☐

Total: ☐ ☐ ☐

Overview Of The Concept: Reflection

What Is Reflection?

Please formulate your own initial working definition of reflection by answering these questions:

1. What do you do when you 'reflect' on an experience?

2. Can you mention two different forms or types of reflection?

3. What is the major purpose of reflection?

> Reflection is an important human activity in which people recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it. (Boud et al, 1985b:19)

Boud et al (1985b) emphasize that reflection is a purposeful activity, not mere day-dreaming. Schon (1983:49) refers to reflection as the act of turning thought back on action. Schutz emphasizes the role of reflection in 'making meaning' of experiences:

> It is misleading to say that experiences have meaning. Meaning does not lie in the experience. Rather, those experiences are meaningful which are grasped reflectively. (Schutz, 1967:69)

Boud et al (1985b) and Boud & Walker (forthcoming) outline a model of reflection on experience with three stages: returning to the experience ('what happened?'); attending to feelings ('how do I feel about it?'); and re-evaluating the experience ('what does it mean?'). They emphasize that each stage is affected by a learner's intent and personal foundation of experience.

Mezirow (1990b:12-13) distinguishes between reflection and 'critical reflection' in which the very premises or presuppositions on which problems are posed are questioned. This echoes Freire:

> But since ... men's consciousness is conditioned by reality, conscientization is first of all the effort to enlighten men about obstacles preventing them from a clear perception of reality. (Freire, 1970b:51)

Was your answer to the first question above similar to these ideas?

Types, Purposes, And Foci Of Reflection

Boud et al (1985b) mention three foci of reflection: it can be directed towards exploring organized knowledge, the context in which the learner finds her/himself, or self-exploration. They see reflection as a beneficial learning activity in itself, and encourage facilitators to promote reflection. Brookfield (1987, 1990:186-9) draws attention to the need for adult learners to reflect on their personal, intimate relationships as a source of insight and significant learning. He particularly advocates 'assumption analysis' to help learners become aware of the commonsense beliefs and rules-of-thumb that inform their thoughts and action. *(Boud, 1987:236; Boud et al, 1985b:24; Loacker & Doherty, 1984:106)*

Schon (1983, 1987) sees a major purpose of reflection as improving the practice of professionals. Shor (1980:93-123) tries to help learners 'make new sense' of familiar and taken-for-granted situations. The purpose of reflection for educators like Freire (1970a:75-6), Heaney & Horton (1990), Mezirow (1990a, b, c) and Shor (1980) and for philosophers like Habermas (1973:9, 23, 275-6) is a radical one: to develop critical consciousness, the ability to recognize and resist oppression in everyday life, and commitment to emancipation. Kemmis (1985:144) sees the unifying purpose of all reflection to be intentional, informed social action. He specifically cautions against an ahistorical, apolitical view of reflection. Freire makes a related point:

> Only beings who can reflect upon the fact that they are determined are capable of freeing themselves. (Freire, 1970b:28)

It is clear that educators' educational philosophies and political ideologies will influence their views about the purposes of reflection. Having considered the views above, what is your opinion now? Has it changed since you answered the three questions at the start of this section? Why/not?

Why Encourage Reflection?

Before reading further, why do you think educators should encourage learners to reflect on their experiences?

It may promote self- and social awareness, and social action

Reflection often results in learners becoming more aware of their feelings, motives, and of themselves in their social contexts. The resulting self-awareness (and reduction of what Habermas [1973:24] calls self-deception) promotes personal growth, and the external linking with the social context promotes critical awareness and may lead to subsequent social action. *(Boud et al, 1985a:11; 1985b:23, 29; Freire, 1970a:75-7; 1970b:28; Goodman, 1984:13; Griffin, 1987:213, 218; Kemmis, 1985:141-6; Mezirow, 1990a:xiii; Pearson & Smith, 1985:76; Shor, 1980:46-91; Walker, 1985:59, 64)*

> Self-reflection leads to insight due to the fact that what has previously been unconscious is made conscious in a manner rich in practical consequences: analytic insights intervene in life ... [whereas] theoretical knowledge has no practical consequences. By learning logic or linguistics I acquire theoretical knowledge, but in general I do not thereby change my previous practice of reasoning or speaking. (Habermas, 1973:23)

Habermas (1973:38-9) goes on to emphasize that the precise nature of the action which people will take as a result of their insights cannot be prejudged or prescribed. (See also Brookfield [1986:23] and Mezirow [1990c:362].) As Heaney & Horton say:

> The problem still remains that, even in a Freirean model of education, people can change their theories without having improved their capacity to change their situations.... Conscientization forces a choice but does not determine the result: One may choose to act or to acquiesce and adapt. (Heaney & Horton, 1990:85, 88)

Freire (1970b:51), Kemmis (1985:147-8) and Mezirow (1990a:xiii) advocate 'reflection on reflection' so that we become aware of how our patterns of thought and the concepts we use are socially constructed and historically limiting. To be truly critical, we need to become aware of and challenge these socially learned limitations:

> In reflection, we have a choice about whether to think and act in conformity with the patterns of communication, decision-making and action in our society, or whether we will intervene at this historical moment on behalf of more rational communication, more just decision-making and more fulfilling human and social action. (Kemmis, 1985:148)

Reflection supports adult education principles

> ... only learners themselves can learn and only they can reflect on their own experiences. (Boud et al, 1985a:11)

Involving learners actively and helping them control as much of their learning as possible are fundamental principles in adult education. Reflection is by definition an active and engaging process for learners, and also one in which they are in full control. They can conceal or reveal as much of their thinking as they choose. These characteristics make reflection supportive of self-directed and adult learning principles.

Reflection improves learning, self-expression and co-operation

> (Siddhartha) reflected deeply, until ... he reached a point where he recognized causes; for to recognize causes, it seemed to him, is to think, and through thought alone feelings become knowledge and are not lost, but become real and begin to mature. (Hesse, 1973:30)

If learners reflect on their experiences, they can internalize ideas, make personal meaning, consolidate their learning, integrate existing and new knowledge, synthesize new ideas, and benefit from 'intuitive learning'. *(Boud et al, 1985b:31-4; Denis & Richter, 1987:32; Dewey, 1938:90; Knights, 1985:90; Loacker & Doherty, 1984:106; Mezirow, 1990b:1-9; Pearson & Smith, 1985:73; Tough, 1981:11; Walker, 1985:60, 64-5)*

Although reflection may at first seem to be a private, individual pursuit, several authors say it in fact encourages dialogue, group work, and drawing on others to extend one's own learning. Reflection thus becomes a co-operative spiral, with one idea being commented upon by someone else, who in turn stimulates the original 'reflector' to pursue the idea further, and so on. *(Boud et al, 1985b:38; Brookfield, 1990; Heron, 1985:132; Walker, 1985:67)*

As Habermas points out, reflection in interaction with others who challenge, confront, and clarify issues is much easier than learners trying to reflect in isolation:

> The self-reflection of a lone subject ... requires a quite paradoxical achievement: one part of the self must be split off from the other part in such a manner that the subject can be in a position to render aid to itself. (Habermas, 1973:28)

Another advantage is that because reflection often involves either writing or talking about an experience, learners practice expressing themselves, often about sensitive personal issues. *(Candy et al, 1985:115; Truscott, 1985; Walker, 1985:61)*

At a different cognitive level, and as we mentioned in Chapter 6, reflection on one's own learning processes can result in more effective learning strategies and approaches being used in future. It is thus a major part of the self-management process. *(Biggs, 1987:75-6; Boyd & Fales, 1983; Griffin, 1987)*

Reflection links theory and practice

Reflection on experience helps us 'bring together the inner and outer parts of our lives' (Lukinsky, 1990:213), and can illuminate where our actions are consistent with our philosophies and theories, and where there are gaps that need to be narrowed. This is not to say that as soon as we are aware of these gaps, we will be able to act differently. New skills are required to change old, unproductive behaviour patterns. However, the first step in this learning process is for learners to become aware of the areas needing attention. *(Argyris, 1982; Argyris & Schon, 1974; Boud et al, 1985b:35; Brookfield, 1990; Candy et al,* *1985:114-5; Goodman, 1984:23; Habermas, 1973:23-4, 28-9; Pearson & Smith, 1985:77; Schon, 1983, 1987)*

Reflection stimulates self- and peer-evaluation

Once people are motivated to change, and know which aspects of their behaviour they want to change, then they can practise specific new behaviours, receive constructive criticism, reflect, and practice again. Self- and peer-evaluation (see Chapter 8) during this testing out phase can be helpful.

Did you think of other reasons for encouraging reflection?

Problems To Avoid

Before reading further, you may want to list any potential problems you might face when encouraging reflection in your work.

Inadequate orientation of learners

> It is not that some adults are inherently incapable of thinking abstractly, becoming critically reflective, or making reflective judgements. It is only that they have not learned how to think in these ways. Many are socialized in sub-cultures – including those of schools – that place little or no value on such ways of knowing. (Mezirow, 1990c:359)

Learners unaccustomed to reflecting on their experiences, feelings and learning will need an explanation of why it is being recommended and some practice before they will feel confident about themselves as 'reflectors'. Schon (1983:69) makes the point that reflection on professional practice is not yet well accepted, so we can expect many learners to be a bit suspicious about its importance and legitimacy. Morphet (1985) emphasizes that unfamiliar processes must be 'naturalized' and made to feel less strange before learners can be expected to adopt them. Without careful orientation, learners may become defensive, feel threatened, or resist the idea. *(Candy et al, 1985:115; Goodman, 1984:20; Main, 1985:98; Mezirow, 1990b:12)*

> **Resistance To Reflection: Comments By Clive Millar, Tony Morphet And Tony Saddington**
> One task that was really difficult to initiate in any meaningful way was that of getting learners to reflect back on the early phases of the course. This period of reflection was marked by an uneasiness and resistance. Other tasks such as ordering and developing the course content were taken on as a way of escaping the process of reflection.

It might help for learners to know in advance how other learners have struggled to become more reflective, and perhaps experienced periods of demotivation and so on. Even if all these steps are taken, however, some learners may resist the process. *(Boud et al, 1985b:26; Candy et al, 1985:102-5; Heron, 1985:133; Lewis, 1984:29; Main, 1985:92; Walker, 1985:62, 65-7)*

At a micro-level, learners may also be left unprepared to reflect on a particular experience. The assumption is often that learners will reflect on experiences gained in the learning group, on a field visit, in a practical situation or whatever. But a problem about asking learners to reflect is: did they actually 'experience' the experience? Poor preparation before a field trip, for example, can result in learners going out with no framework to guide them and coming back with little usable upon which to reflect. We schedule formal briefing sessions beforehand (see Chapter 2), but care must obviously be taken not to pre-judge issues on the learners' behalf. More difficult, we have to remember that the personal and cultural backgrounds of learners and their intent will profoundly affect their perceptions of an 'experience' (see Boud & Walker [forthcoming]; Mezirow [1990b:2-4]; and Usher [1985, 1989]). *(Boud et al, 1985b:37; Griffin, 1987:220; Heron, 1985:138)*

Inadequate orientation of facilitator

Just as most learners are not accustomed to reflecting, most facilitators are unfamiliar with reflecting and encouraging reflection in learners. Inexperienced facilitators may lack the sensitivity needed to encourage learners into a potentially threatening area of self-exploration; or may try to control the process too tightly. They may lack confidence or fear the unpredictability of reflection sessions, especially if learners are reflecting on their emotional responses to an experience. Tight control could also be used to impose their views on learners, or to 'draw all the threads together', thus forcing a false conclusion. *(Bigge, 1982:324, 329; Boud et al, 1985a:14; 1985b:37; Brookfield, 1990:178-9; Goodman, 1984:16; Pearson & Smith, 1985:71, 78)*

> ... it really is important for the group to be able to tolerate intermittent confusion, ambiguity, uncertainty, chaotic profusion of issues and possibilities and apparent difficulties. Otherwise there may be a tendency in group reflection phases for members to press for premature intellectual closure as a defence against the anxiety of the whole process. Clearly this is not in the interests of valid reflection. (Heron, 1985:135)

Some learners may tend to dominate reflection sessions. Strategies like small group discussions or one-to-one discussions can help less articulate members make more productive use of the time. *(Heron, 1985:132; Potts, 1988)*

Clearly, for genuine reflection to occur in a group, a committed and skilled facilitator and a supportive and trusting learning climate are required. *(Argyris & Schon, 1974:96-8; Brookfield, 1990:178-9; Goodman, 1984:13; Habermas, 1973:28-9; Pearson & Smith, 1985:83; Walker, 1985:66)*

Reflecting without acting

While it may be intellectually stimulating, reflection for its own sake is a socially sterile exercise. As our opening quotation by Freire suggests, we see action and reflection as being two sides of the same coin. In the context of transformative or emancipatory education, Heaney & Horton (1990:84-92) write about the importance of linking critical reflection to social action rather than aiming to 'transform minds without transforming action'. Depending on your own educational philosophy, you will either agree with this or not.

Reflection takes time – and more

An obstacle to reflection is that some educators feel there is so much 'content to cover' that there is no time for learners to think about any of it! We must formally allocate time for reflection if our intention is to help learners to reflect. This also demonstrates that we are serious about reflection, and may encourage learners to take it more seriously too. *(Boud et al, 1985b:26; Kemmis, 1985:161; Pearson & Smith, 1985:70)*

On the other hand, the simple allocation of time is not enough to ensure that reflection will occur. Learners need motivation, confidence, and some skills before they can be effective reflectors.

Did you have other ideas to add to this list of potential problems? In the next section, we consider strategies to help learners reflect more actively. Before moving on, you may want to 'reflect on' and review your learning.

Periodic Review

1. What do you see as the major purpose of reflection in your own life and work?
2. Is this purpose similar to or different from that which your colleagues and members of your learning groups see as important? Why/not?
3. Authors referred to above have identified different types or forms of reflection. Could you explain each of these to an interested colleague?
4. Many people do not accept reflection as a valid part of learning. How might you help learners to overcome this 'mental block'?
5. List the rationales for encouraging reflection which you feel are important and relevant in your own situation.
6. Which of the potential problems which we mentioned or you added are most likely to be real problems in your situation? To prepare your thoughts for the next section, try to think of ways of preventing or overcoming each problem you've identified.

How Can We Encourage Reflection?

In our experience, reflection skills can be developed if course co-ordinators are committed to this and aware of some basic strategies to encourage reflection in learners. Some of the strategies for evaluating learning discussed in the following chapter are also aids to reflection, but to avoid repetition, approaches whose primary purposes are evaluative rather than reflective will not be included here. Before reading further, please look back at your responses to questions 4 and 6 in the periodic review above, and also add any new ideas about how you could encourage reflection.

Orientation Of Learners

We believe that learners should be helped to understand the rationale for reflection, and perhaps something of the emerging theories of reflection. They should be reassured that the process of reflection may initially seem strange, and that many learners tend to resist the idea at first. At the same time, they must know that you are committed to reflection as an integral part of your own learning, that you value the insights you gain in this way, and that you would like them to experience similar benefits. If you can provide a positive role-model from the outset, learner-resistance may be less of a problem than in other cases. As Brookfield (1990:181) says, the best way we can help learners to become critically reflective is to model this behaviour.

Can you think of ways you might model reflective behaviour?

Methods Involving Writing

Writing promotes reflection, and we have found this to be useful both for ourselves (reflecting on our experiences as learners and educators) and for the learners with whom we have worked. It is especially important in distance learning where regular reflective discussions are not feasible. Written 'evidence of accomplishment' by participants and the written feedback they receive from co-ordinators can aid reflection. We have found that most participants do not initially find it easy to reflect in their written work, and they need a lot of encouragement before it becomes routine for them to use their experience as a resource for new learning. We encourage learners to keep a diary, journal or portfolio to record both specific learnings and, more important, personal reactions to and insights about what they have experienced. The extracts below are from a learning diary kept by Stephen Knight during an orientation period he was co-facilitating for primary healthcare nursing students. *(Bawden & McKinnon, 1980:4-5; Boud et al, 1985a:10; Heron, 1985:132; Kemmis, 1985:160; Lehmann, 1975:131; Lukinsky, 1990; Potts, 1988:134; Rogers, 1983:65; Sommerfeld & Hughes, 1980:419; Walker, 1985)*

Learning Diary Extracts From Stephen Knight

- This session produced a mixed response. There seemed to be misunderstanding.... Danger: role plays must sometimes be carefully 'translated' to get the intended message across.
- This was mostly an input session and several issues that were for discussion were left unanswered. In an attempt to get through things quickly, not enough time was left for decision-making by the group. I mustn't rush things – must use small buzz groups more often.

- I feel I need to spend much more time reviewing experiences in future. I guess we just try to do too much in too short a time.
- Unless the purpose for using a code is very well established and unless it is well de-briefed, it is potentially dangerous. We used too many games in too short a time.

Some participants may initially feel intimidated by the concept of a learning diary, because they think of a 'diary' as a document which only moody teenagers or famous people keep. It would perhaps be better to use a more neutral phrase like 'learning file' or 'learning notebook' to avoid this initial resistance. Another possible reason for initial resistance is that learners may feel unsure of what to write about. Once again, they may feel threatened by something which is not familiar to them. It may help to show them extracts from the diaries of other learners, provided prior permission was obtained from those learners, of course.

Apart from helping learners consolidate their thoughts and keep track of their learning, extracts from the diary, journal or portfolio could be used, if the learner so decides, as evidence of accomplishment for validation by the course co-ordinator (see Chapter 8), and as a source of feedback for the co-ordinator. *(Potts, 1988:134; Walker, 1985:52)*

Feedback from learners with whom we have worked indicates that they find their diaries a very useful aid to reflection. In a brainstorming session to get feedback about diaries, the following points were made:

The Value Of Learning Diaries: Participants' Comments

- It stimulates me to think of new issues and questions as I write.
- It helps me organize my thoughts and allows later review of material.
- It's a form of record-keeping; I can refer to it later. Feelings may change, so you need a record to reflect on the changes.
- It's so different from passive, mindless note-taking. I can 'construct meaning' in my own mind.
- It gives good practice in written expression, and allows me to measure my own learning.
- But it takes time to think and write!

Our own experience to date has been limited to keeping (and encouraging others to keep) 'learning diaries'. Recently, we have learned of the potential educational value of keeping a personal journal in which specific techniques (eg a written dialogue with a historical figure or a character from myth or literature; returning to major turning points in one's life and imagining if one had taken the 'other path'; reflecting on dreams and so on) are used to deepen reflection (see Lukinsky, 1990).

Det Prozesky suggests keeping insights gained during reflection as visible as possible:

An Alternative To Learning Diaries Suggested By Det Prozesky

Writing down reflections in a learning diary has a big drawback, in my life anyway. They often remain written – that is, not acted upon. One always intends going back to review them, but there isn't time, or you've mislaid them, and you end up repeating the same mistakes. So I use small 'reminder cards' pasted near my desk. I have a wall full of them!

In a workshop we attended, Det also used reminder cards pasted on the wall. Any insights which emerged from group reflection sessions were thus 'captured' and kept where everyone could see them. As the week progressed, we would often refer back to an earlier insight, and either revise or extend it in the light of our subsequent learning. It was a very effective aid to reflection, and gave us all a sense of accomplishment as we saw the wall 'filling up' with new insights.

Learners can also use writing to reflect on their learning at the end of each section of a course, either in a structured evaluation instrument or in open-ended comments. Some of this feedback is useful for co-ordinators in their future planning, but personal reflection can be encouraged as well. For example, participants could be asked: 'Did you learn any new ideas or concepts that you want to adapt or use in your own work? If so, please elaborate.' When we have used this technique after a workshop or section of a course, participants have said that they enjoyed the chance to consciously reflect on their learning.

Another form of writing to encourage reflection is personal letters:

Using A Familiar Technique: Letter-Writing

In the first week of the self-directed course we co-ordinated, we were so excited by what was happening during the climate-building phase (see Chapter 1) that we felt the need to get some of our own thoughts about our experiences as participants in the learning group down on paper. What spontaneously emerged was a series of open letters to various people in the group. (See Appendix 5 for examples). These letters stimulated others to express themselves in writing, some in private letters dealing with very personal issues, and others in open letters addressed to the group as a whole. After the orientation period, when participants had dispersed, this fairly personal and reflective style of writing was continued in the mailed correspondence between ourselves and them (see Appendix 2 for examples). While not everyone in the group opened themselves to this form of reflective writing, several did value it. Although it was not consciously planned, this method of letter-writing may have helped to 'naturalize' the process of reflection somewhat. It was probably also important for participants to realize that we were also reflecting on our learning in the group, not just expecting them to reflect.

Denis & Richter (1987) use poetry to reflect on their learning and learning processes. Some learners may enjoy the freedom and creativity that poetic writing offers. Boud & Walker (forthcoming) recommend devices like observational schedules, checklists, and note-taking during learning experiences, and make the point that writing helps to express, discharge and transform the feelings which learners experience (also see Griffin, 1987:213). Brookfield (1990) recommends brief written reports of critical incidents which can then be read and discussed with peers to encourage what he calls 'assumption analysis'.

Can you think of other ways to use writing to encourage reflection?

Methods Involving Discussion

Talking is quicker and easier than writing. Verbal reports on field experiences, brainstorming, briefing, de-briefing, discussions after role-plays and simulation games, learning conversations, and one-to-one sessions can all be used to encourage learners to 'think out loud' (Higgs, 1988:48). The danger with many of these methods is that 'group-think' may emerge, reflection may remain superficial and descriptive, or learners may censor their thoughts before making them public in a discussion. Most learners will need a balance between written and spoken methods. *(Boud et al, 1985b:32,38; Brookfield, 1990:185; Candy et al, 1985:102-5; Heron, 1985:138; Knights, 1985; Pearson & Smith, 1985; Potts, 1988)*

Deshler (1990) discusses the role of 'metaphor analysis' to help learners become aware of assumptions that influence their perceptions, decisions and actions. Kennedy (1990) recommends that learners discuss and analyse 'personal breakthrough experiences', and, as mentioned above, Brookfield (1990) uses critical incident analysis to help learners discover the assumptions underlying their actions. Many reflective techniques begin with personal experience and lead into analysis – an indirect approach which Brookfield (1990:180-1) feels is necessary to prevent learners from feeling threatened by the process of reflection. In a similar way, Dudu Maoela and Det Prozesky recommend reflective discussions based on personal experience to help learners think critically about education, and to explain the rationale for adult education:

Helping Learners Reflect On Their Education: Dudu Maoela And Det Prozesky

We ask group members to list three things they have learned outside school – things which are important to them, affect their daily lives, and which they can remember learning. Each person then chooses one of these things and is asked to think carefully about the process of how s/he learned it. We ask them the following questions:

- Why did you learn it?
- Who helped you learn it?
- What was the relationship between you and this person?
- What was the situation in which you learned it?
- In what way did you learn it?
- Can you remember anything which made your learning easier or more difficult?

Group members then share their points. Many of the characteristics of adult education are brought out by the group as they describe good and important learning experiences they have had. These can then be contrasted with the characteristics of didactic, authoritarian education.

We schedule regular review sessions for participants to reflect on their learning and how it could be applied in other settings. Individual consultations (see Chapter 6) enable learners to express concerns and develop insights in a one-to-one situation. When we were inexperienced as facilitators of reflection, the major focus in these consultations was learning agreements: they tended to be technical discussions. Later on, however, the focus changed and opportunities for reflection by both participants and ourselves emerged more frequently.

What other ways can you use discussion to promote reflection?

Methods Involving Visual And Other Aids

Visual aids to reflection such as photographs, drawings, and video tapes of learners can be used. Questionnaires, competency lists, and self-assessment instruments can also stimulate reflection. *(Candy et al, 1985:100; Loacker & Doherty, 1984:106-7; Pearson & Smith, 1985:75)*

We never planned to use photographs (taken in formal and informal situations by participants and ourselves) to encourage reflection. However, people would comment about them, and this prompted others to offer alternative explanations (for example, about why a particular person looked so relaxed, or serious, or tired). In this way, we all re-lived different experiences and informally reflected on them. Having seen how useful photographs were, we recommend more formal use of them. For example, a photograph could initiate reflective discussions in individual consultations.

Video recordings are useful aids, but in our situation these were not easy to arrange. Tape recordings may be more feasible. We had good intentions about using tapes which were never realized, however:

(Mis)Use Of A Tape Recorder

During the orientation period, we used a tape recorder in most sessions, thinking that we would use the tapes in later evaluation sessions (we never found time) and that participants might want to re-live and reflect on some sessions (they seldom found time). Some participants amused themselves listening to the tapes on a few evenings, but because of the sheer number of tapes and because we never structured any reflective sessions around this aid, the opportunity for learning was largely lost. We now suggest selective recording followed by structured sessions in which extracts are played back, either to the whole group, or if sensitive issues need to be raised, in individual consultations. This is a potentially powerful aid which we underutilized.

Unusual techniques like the use of movement, mime and graphics can also aid reflection. *(Arnold & Burke, 1983:39-42; Heron, 1985:136)*

Movement And Reflection: Ideas From Dudu Maoela And Det Prozesky

It is useful for participants learning to become community health facilitators to spend a day or two examining their own attitudes before embarking on a community survey. Various techniques can be used by the group for this purpose. One example is to use physical exercise. The whole group does simple exercises together. They see how beautiful it is when they move harmoniously together; they feel how good it is to be alive, and fit, and part of a caring group. And all the while they think about the community: how beautiful it is when people work together to tackle their health and other social problems....

Greene (1990) recommends reading – the use of literature – to aid critical reflection:

> ... although the arts might not themselves change the world, they could contribute to changing the consciousness of the men and women who could change the world. (Greene, 1990:262)

Encourage Evaluation Of 'Reflectiveness'

If you think reflection is a skill worth developing, it is important to help learners become aware of it as an issue; to introduce them to strategies they can use to develop the skill; to support them as they learn and practise the new skill; and finally, to encourage them to reflect on and evaluate their reflective abilities. Griffin (1987) asks participants to 'name the processes' they experience as learners: this helps them become aware of how they reflect and gives them a greater sense of control over their learning. We asked participants to reflect on their 'reflectiveness' and whether it had changed during their course:

Learners' Reflections On Their 'Reflectiveness'

- I did not reflect formally or consciously before. I now do it formally and elicit the help of other people.
- Experiences were not considered before. I used not to reflect on my previous experience and yet experience is the best teacher. You learn from experiences and mistakes.
- I reflect a lot now – possibly over-do things by being too self-critical.
- I am more reflective now. There is so much learning in reflection.

It was encouraging that as these participants became more reflective themselves, they also encouraged the learners with whom they worked to reflect on their experiences. Developing reflective skills in educators can thus cause beneficial ripple effects for the many learners with whom they interact.

Are you sufficiently reflective yourself? Do you provide learners with a good role model in this regard? If not, what strategies can you use to develop your reflective skills?

Periodic Review

1. Which of the strategies we mentioned or you added are appropriate for the learners with whom you work, and why?
2. Would hearing the reflections of others about an experience (say, a field visit) stimulate you to reflect more critically yourself, or would it tend to make you conform to their impressions and conclusions? How does your answer to this question affect your views about the value of reflective writing versus discussions?
3. We have suggested the use of personal letters to encourage reflection. Would you consider using this strategy in your work? Why/not?
4. If you work with learners who have English as their second language, do you think you should encourage them to reflect in English, in their mother tongue, or both? Why?

Practical Exercises

You may find these ideas for practical exercises useful to consolidate your learning, or alternatively, you may have thought of more relevant exercises for your situation.

1. Prepare an outline for a session in which you orientate learners about the benefits and potential problems of reflection. (If possible, build in some reflective work so that learners actually experience the act of reflecting in this session.) What are the objectives of this session? What methods and media will you use and why? How much time is needed? How will you evaluate it?
2. Some learners will initially resist the idea of writing reflectively. It is time-consuming, may feel strange, make them feel that they are 'exposing' themselves and so on. Thinking reflectively may seem more acceptable. Yet many people find that until they write, they never adequately clarify their own thinking. Is this your experience too? How could you encourage learners to try writing?
3. If you have never kept a learning diary, try doing so for a while. For example, jot down any ideas about how you handled sessions, and why, and what your evaluations were afterwards. Or analyse your role in and feelings about staff meetings. After a week or two, decide whether this is a useful strategy, and whether or not you would recommend it to learners.
4. Try encouraging reflection by writing a personal letter either to an individual or the whole learning group. If possible, get feedback from a colleague or friend and re-draft if necessary. Then, decide whether you'd like to share the letter with the learner(s) or not.
5. How can you ensure creativity and freedom of thought – rather than conformity and 'group-think' – in reflective discussions? What skills do you need to practise and develop? Where could you do so?

6. Practise using some aids to reflection (eg photographs, tape recordings) and ask a colleague to role-play a learner while you initiate a reflective discussion with her/him. (Remember that the purpose is to draw out learners' ideas, not to tell them yours!)
7. Design an evaluation instrument to encourage learners to reflect critically on their 'reflectiveness' and whether it is developing satisfactorily.

Conclusion

'We need less teaching and more learning around here' is a common criticism of many educational institutions. One way to change the focus is to actively encourage learners to reflect: on their experiences, situations, goals, roles, assumptions, emotions, learnings, and even their reflections. We have experienced tremendous personal and intellectual growth ourselves as we have learned to become more reflective, and so have many of the learners with whom we have worked. At the same time, we have grown socially and politically: seeing ourselves as actors in a time and place that demands a response, not acceptance or acquiescence. Finally, and this is hardest of all to express, learning to reflect brings what can perhaps best be called a spiritual dimension to learning and life. Perhaps our inclusion of a quotation from Hermann Hesse's 'Siddhartha' hints at this, although we are conscious that this chapter has been much more 'technical' than 'spiritual'. Let us return to Hesse's insights to close:

> [Siddhartha has been asked by his oldest friend, Govinda, to share some of his wisdom]. Siddhartha said: 'Yes, I have had thoughts and knowledge here and there. Sometimes, for an hour or a day, I have become aware of knowledge, just as one feels life in one's heart. I have had many thoughts, but it would be difficult for me to tell you about them. But this is one thought which has impressed me, Govinda. Wisdom is not communicable. The wisdom which a wise man tries to communicate always sounds foolish... Knowledge can be communicated, but not wisdom. One can find it, be fortified by it, do wonders through it, but one cannot communicate and teach it... Everything that is thought and expressed in words is one-sided, only half the truth; it all lacks totality, completeness, unity'. (Hesse, 1973:111-2)

Would it be reasonable to say, then, that a major reason for encouraging deep and critical reflection is to help learners become 'wise'?

Reflective skills can be developed if appropriate strategies are used to encourage this, and if we as co-ordinators place sufficient emphasis on it. There are many advantages to helping practitioners in any field become more reflective, critical and inquiring. However, for those of us who work as educators, this seems even more crucial because we can, by example and by structuring appropriate experiences for learners, encourage others to be more reflective in turn.

As we have mentioned, one of the reasons for encouraging reflection is to promote self- and peer-evaluation. In the next chapter, the issues of evaluation and validation are examined in depth. Before moving on, however, we suggest that you re-assess yourself using the second column of the self-assessment exercise at the start of this chapter. If you find that you still have learning needs that you want to meet, you should find the resources referred to throughout this chapter – especially the edited volumes by Boud et al (1985), Boud & Griffin (1987) and Mezirow (1990) – useful in your continued inquiry.

Chapter 8

Evaluation And Validation Of Learning

> Assessment is the most political of all the educational processes: it is the area where issues of power are most at stake. If there is no staff-student collaboration on assessment, then staff exert a stranglehold that inhibits the development of collaboration with respect to all other processes. (Heron, 1988:85)

Chapter Preview

'Wait a minute! First, you say that learners should analyse their situations, determine their own learning needs and design their own curricula; then you say they can manage their own learning; now you want them to evaluate their learning as well? This is going too far!' When we first proposed introducing alternative evaluation (assessment) approaches for a critical self-directed learning (SDL) course at a conventional university, some of our colleagues were, understandably, a bit incredulous. The idea of sharing control with learners over the educator's ultimately powerful function – that of deciding learners' fates by evaluating them with either a pass or a fail mark – was hard for some authorities to accept. However, once they had reflected on the arbitrary and unfair nature of much conventional evaluation, considered the many alternative purposes of evaluation, and learned more about the validity of alternative evaluations and the role of external validation in SDL, they let us proceed.

As we said in the previous chapter, reflection encourages self- and peer-evaluation, and some of the strategies to encourage reflection can also aid evaluation. So the two chapters are closely related in some ways. Following this chapter about evaluation and validation, we discuss co-ordination of critical SDL in the final chapter.

The questions guiding this chapter are:

- What alternative approaches to evaluation and validation can self-directed learners and course co-ordinators consider?
- What are the reasons for and potential problems of encouraging alternative evaluation approaches?
- Finally, what strategies can be used to help learners take a more active role in evaluation, while not jeopardizing academic standards or the credibility of the course?

Self-Assessment

Please use the same 1-5 scale we have recommended in all the previous chapters: 1 means that you feel very unconfident or ill-prepared, and 5 means that you feel competent or confident about an aspect. The first column is for your initial self-assessment before you start working through the relevant sections of the chapter; the second column is to re-assess yourself after your reading; and the third is in case you want to further your inquiry (perhaps using some of the resources we suggest throughout the chapter) and then re-assess yourself again at some future date.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL, I do/would/can:

• define self-, peer- and client-evaluation (or -assessment)			
• make the distinction between evaluation and validation clear to colleagues and learners			
• critically consider alternative purposes of evaluating			
• consciously choose evaluation approaches which suit the purpose(s) of the evaluation			
• critically consider the rationale for and limitations of using self-, peer- and client-evaluation			
• encourage self-, peer- and client-evaluation by:			
- being an appropriate role-model			
- providing learners with theoretical orientation about the value and validity of these evaluative approaches and about the fact that much teacher-controlled evaluation is invalid, unrepeatable and unfair			
- recommending appropriate evaluation techniques to evaluate knowledge, attitudes and skills			
- warning participants that many self-directed learners under-estimate themselves and their peers in self- and peer-evaluations			
- scheduling time for completion of self- and peer-evaluation exercises			
- encouraging learners to set evaluation criteria			
- ensuring flexibility of the evaluation schedule for the course			
- developing an overall evaluation plan for the course that is as consistent with critical SDL principles as the accrediting agency allows			

- critically examining the rules of the accrediting agency to take advantage of any conditions or exceptions regarding evaluation which would maintain the integrity of critical SDL
- lobbying as soon as it is politically advisable for 'rule changes' or exceptions which will protect the unique features of the critical SDL innovation
- helping learners prepare for tests and examinations if these are prescribed (until institutional rules can be changed)
- taking alternative evaluations seriously (eg ensure that they do 'count' towards yearmarks)
- providing for learning to be validated
- assisting learners to develop and maintain a system for 'keeping track' of their own learning

My additional ideas about evaluation and validation:

Total:

Overview: Self-Evaluation, Peer-Evaluation, Client-Evaluation and Validation

What Is Evaluation (Assessment)?

In Chapter 4 we mentioned the lack of clarity in the literature concerning 'assessment' and 'evaluation', and noted that the terms are usually used synonymously. We distinguished between 'diagnostic self-assessment' (used at the start of a period of study to identify learning needs) and self-assessment or self-evaluation, which occurs during or after a period of study with the objective of judging the extent and/or quality of learning. It is this backward-looking process with which we are concerned here.

As we discuss below, evaluation or assessment may be formative or summative; the period of study may be as short as an hour or two, or as long as a year or more; and the judgement may be made by learners themselves, a peer, educator, client, or some combination of these people using evaluation criteria set by any of these same people.

What Is Self-Evaluation (Self-Assessment)?

There is still very little agreement among different authors. Some think of self-evaluation as a process in which the learner is the evaluator, while others insist that the learner should also be involved in deciding on evaluation criteria. As Boud & Falchikov (1989:534) point out, some educators ask learners to engage in what can best be called a 'grade-guessing' process. *(Arnold et al, 1985a; Bleys et al, 1986; Boud, 1985b:5-6; Cowan, 1988:193; Ferrier et al, 1988:159; Heron, 1988:87-8; Hubbard, 1971; Kegel-Flom, 1975; Lewis, 1984; Linn et al, 1975; Morton & MacBeth, 1977; Sclabassi & Woelfel, 1984; Woolf, 1984; Woolliscroft et al, 1985)*

The lack of clarity causes unnecessary confusion. For example, some authors recommend self-evaluation while others advise us to avoid it. On closer examination, however, it turns out that they are using the same term to refer to completely different processes. Later in this section we suggest a model to help prevent some of the existing confusion. For the moment, let us say that self-evaluation is closely related to reflection (see Chapter 7), but is a more structured process in which learners make a judgment about activities they have performed or the quality and/or quantity of learning they have done. *(Black & Broadfoot, 1982:57; Heron, 1988:88-9; Powell, 1981:208; Rogers, 1983:158-9, 189)*

Cowan makes a point about the need for co-ordinators to really 'let go' if they are serious about implementing self-assessment:

> ... the most important point I have learned about facilitating self-assessment is that I must never allow myself to formulate my own judgement of the mark or rating which a student should receive. I may express comment on discrepancies between the agreed and actual processes of self-appraisal, or fundamental weaknesses in the logic implicit in the reasoning. But, without access to all that the learners know of their learning, any judgements of mine can only be shallow and unhelpful. (Cowan, 1988:202)

What Is Peer-Evaluation (Peer-Assessment)?

How would you define peer-evaluation or -assessment?

Peer-evaluation is the process in which your peer (colleague or fellow-learner) or group of peers makes a judgement about your learning and/or performance. Like self-evaluation, the term peer-evaluation is also used to describe essentially different activities usually involving 'peers-as-evaluators', but with little concern about who set the evaluation criteria or the purposes of the evaluation. *(Dennis et al, 1983; Erickson, 1987; Heron, 1988:85-8; Kegel-Flom, 1975; Morton & MacBeth, 1977; Richardson & Sebilia, 1982)*

What Is Client-Evaluation (Client-Assessment)?

Can you think of some examples of 'clients' who could be involved in evaluation of learners or practitioners?

Some examples of client-evaluators include patients, if health workers are being evaluated, or students if educators are. The extract below is from an evaluation form designed by Elizabeth Malomane, a South African educator, and her colleagues to get feedback from learners. This form was given to learners after they had participated in a week-long process to design a group curriculum (see Chapter 5).

Client Evaluation Where Learners Evaluate Educators: Form Designed By Elizabeth Malomane And Colleagues

1. To what extent do you think we have met the objectives we specified for the week? [Objectives were listed and evaluated individually.]
2. How do you feel now? (Please write anything you feel.)
3. Why do you think we involved you in designing your curriculum?
4. Do you think it helped in any way (despite the fact that it was sometimes frustrating)?
5. If you were an educator of primary healthcare nurses yourself, would you attempt to involve learners in designing their curriculum? If yes, why? If no, why not?

Gcina Radebe, another South African health worker educator, even used client-evaluation to evaluate her evaluations:

Evaluating Evaluations: Comments By Gcina Radebe

After learners had written the test which I set, I asked them to complete an evaluation form about the test. I specifically wanted feedback about the fairness and relevance of the questions, and whether the amount of time we had allowed for completion of the test was sufficient.... I must say that their evaluations, bitter or sweet, are a great lesson because without them I would not have learned anything. The openness of learners is essential, otherwise they would give evaluations which are not true.

Alternative Approaches To Evaluation

In order to communicate more clearly with each other about evaluation, educators should perhaps consider three different aspects of evaluation: who evaluates; who sets the evaluation criteria; and what is the main purpose of the evaluation? As we discuss below, there are several possible answers to each of these questions.

Who evaluates?

Who might act as evaluators or assessors of learning?

The evaluator may be the learner (self-evaluation), a peer (peer-evaluation), an educator, (educator-evaluation) or a client (client-evaluation). In some cases, especially where self-evaluation is included in a formal marking or grading procedure (see Boud, 1989; and Boud [forthcoming]), a combination of these people may be involved in what Heron (1988) calls 'collaborative evaluation' to arrive at a negotiated mark or grade (self- and peer-evaluation, for example; or peer- and educator-evaluation). The self- and educator-evaluation combination seems to be most widely used at present. *(Bawden & McKinnon, 1980:5; Boud, 1989:20, 24-5; 1990:109-10; Buzzell & Roman, 1981:144; Heron, 1988)*

Who sets the evaluation criteria?

Which of the people mentioned above and any others you have added as possible evaluators could feasibly be involved in setting evaluation criteria?

We (and others) think any of the people we mentioned above could help set evaluation criteria. *(Beare, 1985:75; Biran & Biran, 1986; Boud, 1985b:18; Feletti et al, 1984:72-3; Heron, 1988:87-8; Hubbard, 1971; Sasmor, 1984:172)*

We propose the following terms to refer to each option. Self-set criteria are set by the learner; peer-set criteria by (members of) the learning group; educator-set criteria by the educator; and client-set criteria by clients. Combinations of these approaches could also be used, as when a learner negotiates evaluation criteria with peers (self- and peer-negotiated criteria); a learner negotiates with an educator (self- and educator-negotiated criteria); peer- and educator-negotiated criteria; or client- and educator-negotiated criteria. (Other less likely combinations such as peer- and client-negotiated criteria are possible, but to avoid undue complexity of the model presented below, have been omitted.)

The people who set evaluation criteria have considerable control over the evaluation process. Are you prepared to share your control over this part of the educational process with learners? Why/not?

What are the main purposes of evaluation?

What is your answer to this question at this stage?

Many learners believe that the purpose of evaluation is to 'catch them out' with obscure questions about irrelevant issues. Or to separate those who can memorize and regurgitate successfully from those who prefer to think for themselves. For many educators, the most important purpose of evaluation is to decide whether a learner should pass or fail. This conception of the purpose of evaluation is limited. Evaluation can serve a number of different purposes, as listed below. The first part of the list is adapted from the literature, and the final three issues emerged from our experience. *(Abbatt, 1980:73; Guilbert, 1981:2.19; Heron, 1988:85-6; Quinn, 1980:257)*

Alternative Purposes Of Evaluation

- To provide learners with feedback about their mastery of new content.
- To help learners identify specific areas of strength and weakness.
- To motivate learners to continue working (or to work harder).
- To help learners focus on how successful their learning processes are.
- To provide feedback to co-ordinators about their facilitation, provision of resources, and so on.
- To ensure that learners are competent or safe in practice.
- To assign marks which will count towards a composite, final grade (continuing evaluation).
- To assign a final grade: to decide whether learners should pass or fail.
- To assist learners to become more competent self-evaluators.

- To develop skills in peer-evaluation.
- To develop skills in client-evaluation and encourage increased accountability to clients.

Did you think of other purposes to add?

To meet some of these purposes, self-, peer- and client-evaluation is inappropriate, and more conventional educator-controlled evaluation may be required. But for other purposes, educator-evaluation is inappropriate, and client-, self- or peer-evaluation would be preferable. Only after the purpose of the evaluation has been identified can learners and/or educators make rational decisions about what specific type of evaluation is most appropriate.

Educators distinguish between formative (or progressive) evaluation and summative (or certifying) evaluation. Do you know what is meant by these terms?

Formative evaluation is done during a period of study, and summative at the end. Formative evaluation may be for continuing evaluation (it counts for marks), or for providing feedback to learners. In conventional educational literature, this latter type of evaluation is called 'diagnostic', but to avoid confusion with what we have called 'diagnostic self-assessment' in the SDL context (see Chapter 4), we use the term 'feedback evaluation'. *(Abbatt, 1980:76-7; Black & Broadfoot, 1982:57; Ewan, 1984:209; Guilbert, 1981:2.15-2.16; Powell, 1981:208; Rogers, 1983:158-9, 189)*

A model of alternative evaluative approaches

In Figure 4 we try to draw some of the threads of our argument together and show the various options that learners and educators can consider for evaluating learning. The detailed purposes have not been included in the figure; only whether it is feedback, continuing, or summative evaluation.

The blocks numbered 56 and 57 (not indicated in the figure because they are 'behind' other blocks) are the conventional approaches used in TDL courses. While some types of evaluation are unlikely to be used in an accredited course (eg numbers 3 and 6 – which both involve summative evaluation), the model does serve to emphasize that a wide variety of alternative evaluative approaches can be considered by learners and educators.

Sceptical educators can start cautiously by involving learners in setting criteria and evaluating themselves for feedback purposes, while initially keeping control over the continuing and summative processes themselves. However, as we argue later, there is little evidence to support fears that self-directed learners may abuse opportunities to evaluate themselves and their peers, so we strongly recommend more extensive involvement of learners.

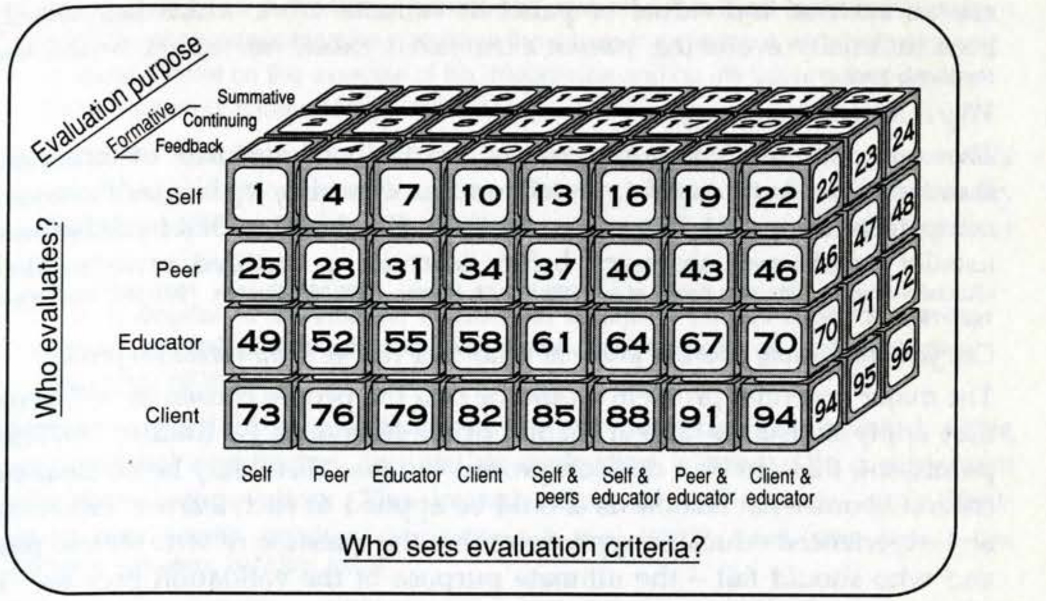

Figure 4 *Alternative evaluation approaches*

To avoid confusion over terminology, this model could help educators express themselves more precisely. For example, Block 1 in the model represents 'self-evaluation using self-set criteria for feedback purposes'.

What terms would you use to refer to the evaluations represented by Blocks 5 and 45?

Block 5 represents 'continuing self-evaluation using peer-set criteria', and Block 45 (not indicated on the model because it is 'behind' others) is 'summative peer-evaluation using peer- and educator-negotiated criteria'.

Using multiple approaches

Educators who are not used to learners and peers evaluating themselves may find it reassuring to use several alternative approaches in order to arrive at a fuller, more comprehensive evaluation – one which they can better 'trust', perhaps. Researchers are encouraged to 'triangulate' by using several research instruments and methods so that the data they produce are more likely to accurately represent a complex social reality. The same principle can be applied here.

What Is Validation Of Learning?

What do you understand by validation?

Validation refers to a process of confirmation or verification that learning (which may have been previously evaluated in a process of self- or peer-evaluation, for example) has in fact occurred. So it can be thought of as a 'stamp of approval' given by a respected person. In a self-directed learning (SDL) course, the course co-ordinators may act as validators, or they may ask an external individual or panel to validate work which has already been internally evaluated. *(Marshall & Lind, 1986:11; Shelton, 1981:163, 175; Simpson, 1976; Swatridge, 1987:3)*

Why is validation necessary?

The rationale for validation relates to the maintenance of academic standards, and to public protection by ensuring that graduates are competent to function in a particular field. Especially in SDL, validation is usually considered necessary before learning is certified or accredited. *(Buzzell & Roman, 1981:141; Ferrier et al, 1988:169-71; Horner, 1986:155; Shelton, 1981:160; Stephenson, 1981:151)*

Can you think of any potential problems which may emerge in the validation process?

The major potential problem would be that the people chosen as validators may apply unusually high or inappropriate standards. As Bradley (1975:68) points out, this can be a difficult process because there may be no clear-cut criteria about what standards should be applied to each learner. However, any experienced educator appreciates that the question of who should pass and who should fail – the ultimate purpose of the validation process – is often extremely difficult even in conventional TDL courses.

Some obstructive colleagues may misuse their role as validators and apply unfair standards to 'prove' that SDL does not work (also see Chapter 9):

> While it is legitimate to expect that credit awarded through experimental programs should be carefully justified, that is no excuse for a double standard either in the learning expected of students or in the rigour of the assessment process. (Willingham, 1977:244)

Having clarified what we mean by the terms we need to use to communicate clearly about alternative evaluation approaches, let us now consider the reasons for and potential problems of encouraging such approaches as part of the critical SDL process.

Why Encourage Self-, Peer- And Client-Evaluation?

What arguments can you think of to support alternative evaluation approaches?

Alternative evaluation is consistent with SDL principles

> It is when the individual has to take responsibility for deciding what criteria are important to him, what goals must be achieved, and the extent to which he has achieved those goals, that he truly learns to take responsibility for himself and his directions. (Rogers, 1983:158)

A major feature of SDL is that the power conventionally held by the teacher is redistributed. As Heron says (see also the quote with which we opened this chapter), evaluation is the area in which educators wield the greatest power:

> The student [in an authoritarian educational system]... is subject to the intellectual authority of an academic elite who have the power to exercise a very high degree of social control on the exercise of his intelligence and on his future social destiny by intellectual grading. (Heron, 1988:77)

In previous chapters we discussed the control that learners can take over the content and process of learning. The next logical and philosophically consistent step (see Boud, 1990) is for learners to take greater control over evaluation as well.

> ... it is illogical to develop an educational emphasis on self-directed learning without stressing the enhancement and development of self-evaluation. (Simpson, 1976:23)

Moreover, individualized learning cannot be reliably evaluated using conventional approaches. Innovative evaluation is needed to complement educational innovation. The incorporation of self-, peer- and client-evaluation seems promising. *(Henderson & Hyre, 1979:77; Heron, 1988; Pallie & Carr, 1987:68-9; Willingham, 1977:225, 232-3)*

Alternative evaluation promotes learning

> The ideal is for evaluation to be a learning activity consistent with the [liberatory] process. (Shor, 1980:112)

Few learners see evaluation as a learning opportunity, and fewer still find it liberating. Removing control over evaluation from the educator reduces anxiety and opens learners to the potentials of using self- and peer-evaluation (and eventually client- and educator-evaluation too) as opportunities for learning and personal growth. *(Erickson, 1987:205-6; Heron, 1988:80; Rogers, 1983:50; Ulmer, 1981:54; Willingham, 1977:240-1)*

Boud (forthcoming) emphasizes that a formal self-assessment process at the end of a period of study helps learners achieve a sense of completion or 'closure': it brings the threads of their learning together in a way which an externally imposed test or examination could never do.

Alternative evaluation shows respect for learners and clients

> [The student in conventional education] is seen as rationally competent to grasp the discipline taught by his academic superiors and to respond appropriately to their assessments. Yet, paradoxically, he is not seen as rationally competent to participate in determining his own academic destiny, nor in assessing his own competence. (Heron, 1988:78)

When educators ask learners to evaluate themselves and their peers, it shows respect for learners' opinions. Likewise, involving clients in the evaluative process shows respect for them, and indicates that practitioners feel accountable to their clients. As Davie (1987:201) says, self-evaluation recognizes that learning is internal and cannot be accurately measured by an outsider. *(Black & Broadfoot, 1982:62; Woolf, 1984:79)*

Alternative evaluation provides preparation for continuing learning

> Muse warns ... 'Competence in learner self-evaluation is not to be acquired by reiteration of its necessity by teachers and postponement of initial practice until after graduation'. (Palmer et al, 1985:497)

Once learners have completed their course, their only sources of realistic and critical feedback will be from self-, peer- and client-evaluation, if they are willing and competent to use these methods. Practising these skills during their course will prepare them for this. *(Boud, 1985b:6; 1990:107; Erickson, 1987:206; Heron, 1988:87; Lewis, 1984:29; Linn et al, 1975:98; Simpson, 1976:23; Woolliscroft et al, 1985)*

Self- and peer-evaluation can be trusted

Educator-evaluation is held in almost mystical regard by most learners and educators, and it is a commonly held myth that learners cannot be trusted to evaluate themselves realistically. The assumption is that learners will over-estimate themselves and their peers. Many educators have found that the opposite is most often the case: learners often evaluate themselves considerably more harshly than their peers or their educators do. *(Arnold et al, 1985a; Boud, 1985b; Cowan, 1988:206; Heron, 1988:90; Kegel-Flom, 1975; Korman & Stubblefield, 1971; Linn et al, 1975; Morton & MacBeth, 1977; Palmer et al, 1985; Powell, 1988:115-6; Schumacher, 1964; Sclabassi & Woelfel, 1984)*

Boud & Falchikov (1989) did a critical literature review of available self-assessment studies (48 papers in 36 journals), and Falchikov & Boud (1989) report on a meta-analysis of 57 studies. The overwhelming finding is that few conclusions can be drawn because of the poor methodology of most studies. As they say, there is 50 years of literature on self-assessment; 20 years of serious study; and only about ten years of methodologically acceptable study. They conclude, however, that there is no doubt about the value of self-assessment to learners. In a subsequent paper, Boud summarizes his thoughts:

> The best evidence which can be deduced from the literature suggests that ... most students generate marks which are reasonably consistent with marks given by staff. However, weaker students do have a tendency to over-rate themselves, sometimes quite considerably, and stronger students have the opposite tendency, although of a lesser magnitude. The influence of formal assessment appears to increase somewhat the tendency for students to over-rate themselves. (Boud, 1989:23)

Given the relative lack of sound research in this area, and the fact that SDL is such a new field, there is no published research we are aware of which specifically examines self-assessment in the context of SDL. Boud (1989:27-8) does mention the importance of the learning climate in influencing how learners will respond to self-assessment procedures, but he does not address the issue of SDL. (However, in a forthcoming chapter based on his own experience, he does recommend using self-assessment schedules in negotiated learning – see Boud [forthcoming]). How applicable to SDL are his conclusions based on the existing research literature, then? Our own limited experience and research suggests not at all:

> Self- and peer-evaluation were found to be considerably harsher than teacher-evaluation on a variety of measures [in this study]. Co-ordinators [of SDL] can thus be reassured that inclusion of these strategies is highly unlikely to result in lowering of standards: on the contrary, the challenge is to help [self-directed] learners become less strict on themselves and their peers. (Hammond, 1988:268)

However, much of our work in SDL has been in the distorted political context of South Africa. Perhaps many of the learners with whom we worked were unusually 'modest' in their self-assessments not so much because they were self-directed learners, but more because of complex social and psychological factors affecting their self-esteem as black South Africans. This is clearly an issue needing further research, but our impression is that self-assessment applied in SDL courses is a unique process which cannot be likened to self-assessment in conventional, competitive educational settings with low trust. While we agree with Bleys et al (1986:235) that the validity of self-evaluation has yet to be firmly established, it has also yet to be strongly questioned. The limited evidence available indicates that self- and peer-evaluation deserve much wider application, especially when one considers the limitations of educator-evaluation, much of which is irrelevant, invalid and unreliable. *(Boud, 1989:23; Hammond, 1985b; Heron, 1988:82; Schumacher, 1964:192-4; Stephenson, 1981:155; Willingham, 1977:242)*

> Traditional examination systems achieve a high degree of pseudo-precision, producing relatively little information that is constructively useful for students or teachers, and conveying it in the form of scores and marks that appear falsely accurate. (Simpson, 1976:22)

Did you think of other reasons to use alternative evaluation approaches?

Potential Problems Of Using Self-, Peer- and Client-Evaluation

Can you think of any potential problems to avoid when implementing alternative evaluation approaches in your own work?

Inadequate orientation of learners

Self- and peer-evaluation are new skills for most learners, who will require clear explanations, structured orientation activities, and feedback about their early attempts. Given that many highly qualified educators fail to evaluate with valid, repeatable and relevant instruments, it is naive to assume that learners will be competent at these tasks without appropriate preparation. In our experience with self-directed learners, a major problem was unduly harsh self- and peer-evaluations when compared with educator-evaluations. Heron (1988:88-90) says we need to raise consciousness about evaluation criteria and 'criterial thinking' given the lack of practice most learners (and educators) have had in setting valid evaluation criteria. *(Black & Broadfoot, 1982:59; Boud, 1985b:19; 1989:27; Brookfield, 1984:68-9; Falchikov & Boud, 1989:426-7)*

Learners may initially resist evaluating themselves or their peers, believing that only educators can evaluate others, or fearing victimization by their peers. Anonymous peer-evaluations can be used to avoid this last problem, but if the learning climate is co-operative, this should not be necessary. Facilitators meeting learner resistance must show that they believe learners can in fact take more control over evaluation. *(Boud, 1985b:19; Cowan, 1988:207; Davie, 1987:202; Richardson & Sebilia, 1982:55; Rogers, 1983:62; Woolf, 1984:79; Woolliscroft et al, 1985:845)*

How will academic standards be maintained?

Many educators concerned about maintaining academic standards resist the idea of self-, peer- or client-evaluation. *(Davie, 1987:203; Henderson & Hyre, 1979:76; Ibbotson, 1983:10-11; Powell, 1981:208)*

Cowan (1988:206, 208) notes that in his experience, the few learners who awarded themselves 'astonishingly high marks' in the first formal self-evaluation never did so again later. He believes this was perhaps because he refused to challenge them: he had said that self-evaluations would be recorded, and they were. Perhaps these few learners had been deliberately 'testing him out', and once reassured that he could be trusted, they themselves acted in a trustworthy way.

TDL co-ordinators should consider the arbitrary, invalid, unrepeatable and unfair nature of much conventional evaluation (see above). However, this is not to imply that 'two wrongs make a right'. The issue of maintaining standards is crucial for SDL co-ordinators to consider, because the credibility of innovative courses and their graduates is at stake. *(Griffith, 1987:62; Horner, 1986:155; Richardson, 1987:206; Shelton, 1981:175; Stephenson, 1981:154-5; Willingham, 1977:225)*

How can academic standards be maintained in a self-directed course?

Standards are assured at two different stages in the SDL process. First, when a learning agreement is initially submitted, the course co-ordinator studies the learner's proposals and asks advice from an external panel if necessary. It is only accepted as a contract if both the learner and co-ordinator are satisfied that the planned studies are 'worthy' of the qualification to be received. (In our work, we had a greater problem with diploma-level learners submitting degree- or even higher degree-level learning agreements than with learners proposing to do 'too little' to warrant a diploma.) *(Stephenson, 1981:146; Willingham, 1977:241)*

The second point at which standards are assured is when learning (which may have been previously self-, peer- or client-evaluated) is validated by the course co-ordinator or a panel of external collaborators. In our opinion, these safeguards in SDL do more to maintain standards than the often inadequate evaluation procedures used in many conventional courses. *(Erickson, 1987:206; Knowles, 1980:386-9; Marshall & Lind, 1986:11; Richardson, 1987:206; Shelton, 1981:163, 175; Simpson, 1976, 1985; Swatridge, 1987:3)*

Abuse by the educator

It is possible that some educators may institute a system of self-, peer- or client-evaluation simply to decrease their own load of marking. Alternatively, educators may pay lip-service to innovative evaluations, while the only ones they (and therefore their learners) take seriously are conventional teacher-evaluations.

Did you think of other potential problems to avoid? Before considering strategies to encourage alternative evaluation, you may want to review your learning.

Periodic Review

1. Could you explain to a colleague why we recommend more specific terms (eg 'continuing self-evaluation using peer-set criteria') for different types of self-, peer- and client-evaluation?
2. What is your opinion of the evaluation model we proposed in Figure 4? Is it perhaps too detailed for your purposes? Or have we omitted something which you feel should be included?
3. Look back at the model in Figure 4, and make a list of approaches you have already implemented, and those worth trying in your own work. If you need to read more about an approach, please refer to the references in the section where it was introduced.
4. Using the terminology we have suggested in the model, how would you describe this type of evaluation: participants are given a test to complete at the end of a module so they can see how much they have learned. The answers are provided at the end of the test and learners each mark their own tests. (Our suggested answer is given below.)

   We think this is a form of 'self-evaluation using educator-set criteria for the purpose of feedback'. It is self-evaluation because learners marked their own tests. But the educator provided model answers, so the criteria are educator-set. It is for feedback because the purpose was to help learners see how much they had learned, not to 'count for marks'.

5. Which of the arguments in favour of using alternative evaluation approaches we have discussed or you have added would convince some of your conservative colleagues to try a new approach? On the other hand, are there some things which you see as advantages but which would make them even more resistant to change because of their different educational (and social) philosophies?

6. How could you argue in favour of self- and peer-evaluation without making your colleagues defensive about the invalidity of much educator-evaluation?
7. To prepare your thoughts for the next section, what strategies could you use to overcome or prevent the potential problems of using alternative evaluation approaches?

Increasing Learner Control Over Evaluation

What strategies would help learners take greater control over evaluation while still ensuring that academic standards are maintained? (Your answer to question 7 in the review above should be of use here.)

Provide Positive Role-Models

Co-ordinators encouraging learners to use alternative evaluation approaches should use these approaches themselves. You could, for example, use self-evaluation in personal letters shared with learners (see Appendix 5), and peer-evaluation by asking a colleague to sit in and give feedback about your facilitation. Involving learners as evaluators of your educational work (a form of client-evaluation) also provides a powerful stimulus for them to consider opening themselves to alternative forms of evaluation.

Ensure Adequate Orientation Of Learners

Theoretical orientation

Learners may initially resist the idea of evaluation which is not educator-controlled. We have emphasized in previous chapters that any unfamiliar processes may seem threatening at first, and the same applies to alternative evaluation. Don't assume that self-directed learners will be open to alternative evaluation approaches. It is possible that they may in fact be less adventurous than other learners. Why? So much else in the SDL process may still be unfamiliar and threatening to them, so learners on a teacher-directed course may ironically be more open to new ideas about evaluation. (But would their educators be open to these ideas?)

To avoid learner resistance, co-ordinators should encourage participants to consider available research about self-, peer- and teacher-evaluation; the unreliability and invalidity of much conventional evaluation; the tendency for self-directed learners to undervalue their learning; and the fact that most learners are initially resistant to alternative evaluative approaches.

Participants should be actively encouraged to use a variety of evaluation approaches and to think of creative and innovative ways to prove competency. Simpson (1976:26) points out that most learners resort to conventional methods (such as essays and written reports) for submitting evidence of accomplishment unless they are specifically encouraged to think of alternatives. Extracts from learning diaries, tape recordings, photographs, poetry, feedback from peers or clients, transcripts of conference speeches, articles submitted for publication – these and many other ideas are all worth considering.

Practical orientation

Self-, peer- and client-evaluation need practice like any other new skill. Learners will need feedback on their early attempts and encouragement to continue refining their skills. Some authors recommend negotiation sessions to reach consensus between learners and teachers about what mark a piece of work deserves. Such sessions could be used early in a course to orientate learners who are just starting to evaluate their own work and that of their peers. *(Boud, 1989:24; Buzzell & Roman, 1981:144; Higgs et al, 1985:11; Rogers, 1983:158)*

Realistic self-, peer- and client-evaluation depends largely on a person's ability to set relevant and detailed evaluation criteria, so learners need to practise and develop this skill. Criteria are often too vague to be useful. In general, we have found the more detailed the evaluation criteria, the better. In the extract below, we include some detailed criteria which Gcina Radebe used to get peer-feedback on her lecturing skills. The form used by Stephen Knight (see Chapter 1) to evaluate the learning climate also shows excellent use of detailed criteria to ensure that the feedback received is meaningful and can be acted on.

Extract From A Peer-Evaluation Form Designed By Gcina Radebe

Please use a rating scale where 1 means very poorly, 2 means poorly, 3 means well, and 4 means very well.

To what extent/how well did I:

- introduce the topic?
- present information in a logical yet interesting manner?
- integrate subject matter with other parts of the syllabus?
- encourage learners to ask questions?
- encourage learners to act as resource people among themselves?
- provoke thought and encourage problem-solving?
- consciously build on the prior knowledge or experience of learners?
- use appropriate visual aids?

(List continues.)

Any other comments, observations or feedback to help me improve will be welcome.

Evaluation Schedules Must Support Alternative Evaluation

Educational authorities may be fearful of SDL, and even more so of proposals to use alternative evaluation. They will probably require reassurance about how learners will be evaluated. Much of the theoretical orientation about alternative evaluation approaches that learners need may be relevant for these authorities too. They must be convinced that a conventional evaluation schedule which pre-specifies topics of essays, dates of tests and so on, is simply not appropriate for a self-directed course. The same applies to formal examinations at the end of a course. When we started a self-directed course within a conventional university, this was a major obstacle:

> ***Reflections On Final Examinations In SDL***
>
> It was a rule of the university that at least 50 per cent of the final mark must be from formal examinations at the end of the course. When we discussed the contradiction of applying this rule for a self-directed, competency-based course, the senior staff working with us advised us not to 'rock the boat' yet. They thought it would be strategic to get the course established, allay the anxieties that naturally existed among faculty about the course, and then start lobbying to have the rule changed, or at least for this course to be considered an exception. We were forced to compromise on this, but think it is essential to bring this aspect of the evaluation process into line with the philosophy and practice of other aspects of the course as soon as possible. If this fails, the tendency may be for other aspects of the self-directed course to be watered down: it may become yet another co-opted innovation (see Chapter 9).

Ferrier et al (1981:133) say that McMaster's students are not subjected to any examinations throughout their self-directed medical course. Yet as soon as their course is over, graduates have to sit a conventional national licensing examination to register as doctors. It seems to us that if this is the reality facing participants, educators should assist learners to cope by providing some practice in formal testing situations, for example. As long as the rationale for this is clear to all involved, and as long as these concessions to conventional educational practice do not subvert the nature of the course as a whole, there should be no serious problems. Life is full of contradictions, compromises and ambiguities, and it is perhaps over-protective to think that self-directed learners cannot cope with some of these in their courses. We faced this issue in our own work, and compromised:

> ***A Test With A Difference***
>
> It was six months into the two-year self-directed course we were co-ordinating. As discussed above, participants on the first course would have to sit a formal written examination at the end of their course. The majority of participants had never been at university before and we knew some of them were anxious about the exam. So we designed a 'mid-year test' and invited participants to look at it, and if they wanted to, to try answering it. We suggested they might want to evaluate themselves or ask a peer to do so, but we also offered to 'mark' any tests if they wanted us to. They seemed reassured when they saw the kind of questions we expected them to be able to answer. No one asked us to mark their test for them, which we took as a sign that they were starting to feel less dependent on conventional evaluation techniques.

Some educators think that we should have taken a 'purer' stance and refused to set a conventional test in the first place. Others think it was a pragmatic compromise in view of the compulsory final exam. What would you have done, and why?

An important way of demonstrating your own commitment to alternative evaluation (and therefore of increasing learner confidence in and respect for such evaluations) is to make self-, peer- and client-evaluations 'count for marks'. In most innovative courses reported on, although self- and peer-evaluation may be used for feedback purposes, educators usually maintain full control over continuing and summative evaluations. *(Beare, 1985:76; Feletti et al, 1984:72-3; Higgs et al, 1985:11; Istiantoro, 1985:18; Kuhn & Fasano, 1984:153; Shelton, 1981; Stephenson, 1981:150)*

What message do you think is being communicated to learners when this happens? Are you willing to share the control you have over continuing and summative evaluations with learners? Why/not?

Make Provision For Validation Of Learning

> Some learning may require direct evidence such as an examination or actual observation of performance; in other instances, it may suffice to use indirect methods like the testimony of a supervisor.... (Willingham, 1977:239-40)

There are no clear guidelines about how validation should be handled. Much depends on the nature of the course, the competencies being developed and the academic level of study. Ultimately, a lot depends on the personal credibility of the validator. As in conventional educator-evaluation, educators must use discretion and common sense in determining standards for validation.

> In order to be fully accredited, however, she must also demonstrate her ... skill successfully in at least two other settings. (Loacker & Doherty, 1984:113)

When can we validate that a particular skill has been acquired? After one excellent demonstration in a formal evaluation setting? Or after several such observations? Or should the observations occur when the participant is unaware that an evaluation is being made? Should it be in a natural (real-life) setting? And what if, after many excellent performances, one poor demonstration is observed? Can one then 'un-validate' something that has been previously validated, and request additional practice and further demonstrations of competency?

You may want to formulate your own answers to the questions above before reading our ideas.

In our work, we decided that a single competent demonstration in any setting would be sufficient for us to validate that a skill had been mastered. A critic might argue that this system hardly guarantees competency. A single 'lucky break' while the right people were observing would be enough to have a competency validated. Our response is that so many competencies are inter-related that an incompetent practitioner could never have sufficient 'lucky breaks' to get all the core competencies validated. An additional, more cynical, point could be made. We could ask critics who favour TDL to explain exactly how they decide whether their learners have mastered these same skills. Do we assume that because a particular lecture was given, participants must now be competent? Or do we first check the attendance register to ensure that a particular learner was present? Or should we insist that learners pass a written test describing how they would perform the skill? Or must the test be a practical one? If so, how many times must one learner pass that same test before we will accept that s/he has in fact passed?

To be sure, co-ordinators of innovative courses must be able to justify their decisions about validating learning to others who may be unsympathetic to SDL. For this reason, we recommend that great care be taken in maintaining detailed records. We found little about this in the literature when we were preparing to co-ordinate a self-directed course. The system we used was therefore devised as the course progressed. We describe it in some detail below in case you find some of the ideas useful in your work.

A System For Keeping Track Of The Progress Of Self-Directed Learners

In each participant's official file for the course, we kept a copy of their completed self-assessment form/competency profile. As soon as the preliminary learning agreement (PLA) was drafted (see Chapter 5), marginal notes were entered onto the competency profile to indicate which particular competencies would be mastered if each objective was achieved, and a pencil line was drawn through the relevant competencies. In this way, we had a visual picture of which sections of the competency profile were being included in the PLA, and could give feedback about gaps in the PLA which should be closed before it could be accepted as the final learning agreement (FLA). Pencil was used because we anticipated changes before the FLA was accepted.

Thereafter, when work was presented as evidence of accomplishment or as evidence of prior competency, we evaluated it. If it was accepted and validated on first draft, a solid pen line was drawn through the competencies concerned, and a solid line was drawn through the relevant objective in the learning agreement. If the work was considered to be 'not yet adequate', dotted lines were drawn through the relevant sections of the competency profile and learning agreement, to indicate that some work had been done but that it had not yet been validated. In this way, a mere glance through the learning agreement and competency profile for each individual gave a visual impression of progress or lack thereof. This made preparation for individual consultations and the writing of progress reports very quick and easy.

If competencies were demonstrated during residential blocks, or if a particular piece of evidence demonstrated additional competencies not initially included in the learning agreement, these were duly validated using a solid line on the competency profile, and a marginal note was made to refer to the basis for the validation. For example, 'micro-teaching session, block 3' in the margin indicated that this competency had been validated in that session at that time. If the evidence was in written form (eg a report, a lesson plan, written feedback from learners), it was filed so that it could be evaluated by someone else (eg an external examiner) in future if necessary.

Did you think of other strategies which educators could use to encourage alternative evaluation approaches while still maintaining academic standards and the credibility of a course? The literature in this field is still relatively limited, so we hope that the ideas in this section – and others you have added – will be useful to you.

Periodic Review And Issues To Consider

1. Which of the strategies we have mentioned or you have added do you think are important to adapt or implement in your work?
2. What creative alternatives could the learners with whom you work use to provide evidence of accomplishment or competency instead of using the usual essays and written reports?
3. In your situation, who are the best people to act as validators? Why?
4. We have argued that educators should provide positive role-models if they want learners to take alternative evaluation approaches seriously. How might you use alternative approaches in a way which will be evident to learners?
5. Can you see how the learning climate (see Chapter 1) on your course will fundamentally affect your ability to introduce self- and peer-evaluation? Learners must not only trust you, but also themselves and their peers. Do you think the learners with whom you work have this kind of trust?

Practical Exercises

You may find some of these exercises useful if you are thinking of implementing alternative evaluation approaches in your work. Alternatively, you may have thought of other more appropriate exercises to complete.

1. Prepare an outline for a session in which you introduce learners to the idea of using alternative evaluation approaches. Is it necessary to explain why you want to move away from educator-evaluation? Should potential problems be mentioned to them? Should they have time to discuss your proposals in small groups and raise queries or concerns? Will they need some practice sessions? What visual aids could you use? What other issues need to be considered?
2. Prepare an outline for and then draft a document arguing for a change in institutional policy concerning formal tests and examinations because they will not provide valid information about the progress of individual, self-directed learners. Ask a colleague for feedback, re-draft if necessary, and then use the document to lobby for institutional change.

3. You decide to use self- and peer-evaluations to 'count for marks'. Design an evaluation schedule for your course showing which evaluations, at which times, will count what towards the yearmark.
4. Draft a letter asking a colleague to be a validator or to join a panel of external validators. Assume that this person needs orientation about evaluation versus validation in self-directed learning.
5. Design a system for keeping records of validation. Ensure that if these records were examined by an external examiner, or the dean/principal, you would be in a strong position to defend the learners and the self-directed approach you are using.
6. We have listed 11 alternative purposes of evaluation. Which purposes are important in your work? Now, which types of evaluation mentioned in the model we proposed could be used to achieve each purpose?
7. A young colleague hears you trying to persuade other educators to try alternative evaluation approaches. She says: 'I don't know why you are getting so excited about all this. I can't take evaluation of learners seriously at all. Everyone knows it is just a joke. Really, it's just a bourgeois plot to categorize people and perpetuate the status quo. And the learners themselves know that tests and exams are an evil to be survived.' You suspect she is hiding behind all these words to avoid thinking more critically and acting more appropriately. How would you answer her, without alienating her or other colleagues who are listening? (If possible, ask a friend or colleague to role-play this person so that you can practise arguing in a life-like situation.)
8. A learner has allocated herself 55 per cent in a self-evaluation of a written assignment. You feel it is worth at least 75 per cent, and are disappointed that she has undervalued her work again – she always does! How would you deal with this problem, and why? (Once again, you may want to role-play this situation.)
9. In our experience, the opposite problem is much rarer in SDL, but worth thinking about and role-playing in case you ever have to face it. Imagine that another learner has allocated 70 per cent in her self-assessment, but you think she has over-estimated her work. How would you deal with this, and why?

Conclusion

The routine and unimaginative work that passes for evaluation in conventional education must be exposed for what it is. Tests and examinations are too often irrelevant, unrepeatable, invalid and therefore simply unfair. Learners are kept in a dependent, intellectually stultifying position. On the other hand, the range of alternative evaluation approaches we have recommended draws on a wide variety of creative techniques and multiple perspectives. The processes encourage growth, collaboration, and empowerment for learners and educators alike. For us as educators, it was a great relief to divest ourselves of the burden of being solely responsible for evaluating the learning of others: what a presumption it is to try. And the self-directed learners with whom we worked – after overcoming their initial scepticism and resistance – found the process of taking greater responsibility for evaluating themselves, their peers, and us to be both challenging and personally affirming. In addition, the trust we placed in them as evaluators had positive spin-offs: to support Heron's opening quotation, collaboration on evaluation potentiated collaboration in all other aspects of the course. Needless to say, if you experiment with alternative evaluation approaches, you will face obstacles from rigid institutional rules and threatened faculty members. But even these challenges can be overcome, as we discuss in the next and final chapter.

To conclude your work on this chapter, we suggest that you return to the self-assessment exercise and use the second column to re-assess yourself. This will provide you with a clearer idea of your existing strengths and any remaining weaknesses. If you want to continue your inquiry in this area, the resources referred to throughout the chapter should be helpful.

Chapter 9

Co-ordinating Critical Self-Directed Learning

> ... this innovation, like any other, got off the ground because an individual was committed to it, found ways to make it possible without provoking opposition, and demonstrated outcomes which were sufficiently convincing to forestall any attempts to interfere with the consolidation of the development. If you can't manage to satisfy these tactical requirements, I am afraid it doesn't matter how educationally creative you are as an innovator, you are unlikely to be permitted to survive. (Cowan, 1988:210)

Chapter Preview

If you are already co-ordinating a self-directed learning (SDL) course, you'll know why we say that it's the most demanding and rewarding educational work we've ever done. If you have not yet made the change from teacher-directed learning (TDL) to SDL, perhaps you are thinking about doing so. If so, some of the additional ideas about co-ordinating critical SDL gathered here may be of interest.

Throughout this book, we have emphasized that co-ordinators (and learners) need adequate orientation to each step in the critical SDL process if implementation of a watered down or perverted form of SDL is to be prevented. In this chapter, we further analyse this issue of adequate co-ordinator orientation. At the most basic level, critical SDL co-ordinators have a philosophical commitment to freedom, justice and equality within and outside of educational institutions. Assuming that this exists, we believe that there are three major components involved in helping educators adjust to the new role of a critical SDL co-ordinator. First, they need a radical re-conceptualization of their role to minimize the chances of their educational practice being oppressive rather than liberating. Second, they need insight into the institutional and faculty-related constraints on educational innovation to avoid being co-opted. Third, they need specific competencies to cope with the unfamiliar demands of critical SDL co-ordination.

We address the first two issues in this chapter. The third – concerning specific competencies – has been dealt with in detail in the previous chapters. The major questions guiding this chapter are thus:

- How can critical SDL co-ordination be conceptualized and practised to ensure that the basic principles of critical SDL are not perverted?

- What institutional and faculty-related constraints on critical SDL do course initiators and co-ordinators need to overcome?

Self-Assessment

Please use the same 1-5 rating scale we have recommended in all the previous self-assessment exercises to assess your learning needs for this chapter.

As a co-ordinator of critical SDL I do/would/can:

- conceptualize my role in a new way
- overcome conventional institutional constraints on critical SDL by:
  - ensuring support from credible senior staff
  - working to institutionalize critical SDL initiatives
  - protecting SDL from bureaucratization and co-option
  - ensuring adequate funding
  - keeping meticulous records of learner progress (see Chapter 8)
  - keeping others informed, pre-empting fears and suspicions if possible
  - planning well in advance so as not to put the system under unnecessary stress (eg get budgets in before the deadline etc)
  - behaving in a confident, unapologetic and assertive manner in meetings
- overcome faculty-related constraints on critical SDL by:
  - providing adequate orientation and support for all faculty involved in the initiative
  - preventing staff from abrogating co-ordinating responsibilities
  - providing encouragement to maintain initial staff enthusiasm
  - preventing sabotage by obstructive colleagues
  - developing an appropriate framework for accredited critical SDL
- overcome learner-related constraints on critical SDL by:
  - starting to orientate learners to critical SDL before they enrol for the course
  - providing intensive orientation at the start of the course, knowing that some learners will initially be resistant to critical SDL
  - ensuring follow-up support

- remain critically aware of the differences between critical SDL and TDL, and ensure that the administrative systems set up are consistent with the philosophy of the course ☐ ☐ ☐

My additional ideas about critical SDL co-ordination: ☐ ☐ ☐

Total: ☐ ☐ ☐

Towards A Re-conceptualization Of Roles

Why Should Co-ordinators Of Critical SDL Re-conceptualize Our Roles?

Can you think why we suggest that we co-ordinators of critical SDL should think of our roles in a new way?

Most educators who innovate with SDL do so in conventional institutions, and as we discuss later, many of them have problems introducing and sustaining SDL. Except in rare cases where the entire institution is committed to an alternative educational approach, co-ordinators will be under pressure from colleagues, administrators and learners to conform with respect to both the content (conservative, unquestioning of the status quo) and process (didactic, authoritarian) of their work. In addition, they have to guard against their own socialization in teacher-directed learning (TDL). The tendency to compromise on basic principles, to accept 'watered down' proposals, and ultimately to be co-opted back into the mainstream must be constantly resisted if the innovation is to survive. Therefore it seems important for co-ordinators of critical SDL to conceptualize their roles in a new way, consciously distancing themselves from the prevailing norms and negative role-models of TDL. If we can think differently about our work, then the task of practising progressively and consistently may be easier. *(Boud, 1987:222; Brookfield, 1986:294-7)*

Did you think of other reasons why critical SDL co-ordinators should re-conceptualize our roles? We have found that our educational practice improves when we stop thinking of ourselves as 'course co-ordinators', and see ourselves instead as participatory researchers, working together with a learning group. In the next two sub-sections, participatory research (PR) as it has been applied elsewhere is briefly described, and then an adaptation of the PR framework is proposed for consideration by critical SDL co-ordinators.

How Is Participatory Research (PR) Usually Applied?

Have you heard of participatory research? If so, can you explain what is meant by the term? If not, can you guess what it involves?

Participatory research (PR) is a radical new approach to social research and action. The emphasis in PR is on community education, empowerment and control. The role of the participatory researcher is to facilitate co-operative learning and work, and through this, to help people take greater control of their lives. *(Collins, 1986; De Souza, 1985; Dubell et al, 1981; Fals-Borda, 1981; Feuerstein, 1980; Hall, 1975; Kassam & Mustafa, 1982; Kuhanga, 1982; Society for Participatory Research in Asia, 1982; Tandon, 1985; Werdelin, 1979)*

> Participatory research is, indeed, an educational approach to social change. (Society for Participatory Research in Asia, 1982:2)

Given that PR is so different in its aims and processes from conventional social research, it may be preferable to refer to the facilitator as an 'animator', 'popular educator', 'community worker' or 'community activist', rather than a 'researcher'.

A PR project usually focuses on a specific community problem which members of the community have themselves identified – although it often requires the assistance of the animator to help a group reach consensus about what can reasonably be tackled. Once the problem – for example, poor water supplies in a village – has been clearly stated, it is then collectively 'researched' or investigated and analysed by the PR group, with the animator stimulating members to become more critical in their thinking. When the causes and effects of the problem have been analysed, and various options for community action have been identified and evaluated, the group is then ready to take collective action to try to solve the problem. Working and learning together in this way, they increase their understanding of the issues affecting their lives, and sense something of the power they have as a co-operating community group. Thereafter, they are likely to be in a stronger position to tackle other problems together. The framework for PR suggested by proponents thus usually includes at least these major phases: statement of the problem; collective investigation; collective analysis; and collective action.

Adapting The PR Framework For Critical SDL

We believe that this same basic framework can be adapted for use in formal educational settings. The essential prerequisite is that critical educators should conceive of their roles radically differently from conventional educators, just as participatory researchers conceive of their roles differently from conventional social researchers. In the case of PR, the aims are different (encouraging people to develop critical understanding, promoting conscientization and social action; not data gathering for academic purposes), and the methods and approaches they use are thus different (group discussion, popular theatre and so on; not surveys, observational techniques and the like). In a formal educational setting like a school, adult education centre, college or university, the aims of critical educators differ from conservative ones (learner empowerment and the promotion of social equality and justice; not information transmission and socialization for acceptance of the status quo), and the methods and approaches are also different (project work, group discussions, discovery learning, self-directed work, self- and peer-evaluation and so on; not lectures, tests and the like).

The problems a participatory researcher often has are very similar to those which a progressive educator adopting a similar approach will face. Can you think what some of these problems may be?

Animators have usually had more education than those with whom they work in the field, and are thus often looked up to as 'experts', the ones who have come to 'solve our problems' – unquestioned leaders. Yet their challenge is to help people discover that they have the ability to take control for themselves; that they can actively create knowledge for themselves; that they can work together to change the conditions under which they live and work. In the same way, an educator will almost inevitably be placed in a position of leadership by learners. Their challenge is to help learners discover that they are the only ones who can learn; that they have internal resources to draw upon; that their experiences and emotions are valid sources for learning; and that they can use their learning to act upon and change conditions around them.

At a different level, participatory researchers may be scorned by academic colleagues in the social sciences who pursue conventional research projects and play conventional academic games. Likewise, educators who try to change the rules of the educational game in TDL institutions may meet opposition and be ridiculed too, as we discuss later in this chapter.

Did you think of other things participatory researchers and progressive educators working in formal settings may have in common?

While these similarities do exist, there are clearly some important differences between the roles of community animators and co-ordinators of critical SDL courses.

Can you think of some differences, and suggest how the phases of PR would need to be adapted by SDL co-ordinators?

Each participant in a learning group can phrase a personal 'statement of the problem' which explains why they are doing a particular course. These are likely to differ for different individuals, and also to change as the course progresses. In other words, the specific problems which participants are addressing as learners are individually defined and re-defined. In some cases, two or three people might have needs in common, but in others, the needs may be unique to a particular individual. The phases of collective investigation and analysis could thus be adapted to include individual, small group, and collective (large group) work. Moreover, the whole issue of evaluation and validation needs to be addressed by co-ordinators of accredited SDL as we discussed in Chapter 8.

You may or may not relate to the idea of viewing yourself as a participatory researcher. (Higgs [1988:57-8], for example, prefers to think of herself as a manager; and Knowles [1986:43-4] as a counsellor and consultant). The radical social and political philosophy underpinning participatory research (PR) is consistent with our vision of critical SDL, and the PR framework itself provides some guiding principles for progressive educational practice which are amenable to adaptation by educators working in more formal settings. So we personally have found PR to be a useful model, but the detail about PR is less important than the basic principle we are proposing: educators wanting to implement educational alternatives are more likely to succeed and resist being co-opted if they conceptualize their roles in a new way.

Role Transformations We Have Experienced

It was our experience as co-ordinators of SDL that as our confidence in the new role grew, and as we saw for ourselves how well learners could indeed take control of their own learning, we needed to think of ourselves less and less as 'educators', 'facilitators', or 'course co-ordinators'. Although these terms 'fitted' better than thinking of ourselves as 'teachers', they still carried connotations of leadership, dominance and power. We felt the need to escape from conventional relationships and roles, and needed to use a radically different point of departure. We found participatory research to be that point. When we started consciously thinking of ourselves as participatory researchers or animators working with a learning group, our behaviour was much more consistent with adult education and self-directed learning principles than when we played the more familiar roles of educator, facilitator, or co-ordinator. It was a different 'way of being' in a learning group – a way which we experienced to be personally liberating, and which seemed to provide more space for others in the group to liberate themselves too.

While a re-conceptualization of roles is crucial, it is not sufficient to ensure success in critical SDL co-ordination. Innovators need to work strategically to protect themselves, their courses and the learners with whom they work. In the next two sections, therefore, we address the second major question raised in the overview: what institutional and faculty-related constraints on critical SDL is a co-ordinator likely to face, and how can these be overcome?

Overcoming Institutional Constraints On Critical SDL

How could you overcome the resistance to critical SDL you are likely to find in a conventional educational institution?

Get Initial Support 'From Above'

Innovators need support from powerful and respected individuals in the institution: to influence resistant administrators; to lobby changes through the necessary committees; to silence the critics. Without this support, your ideas for change may never get serious consideration. *(Higgs et al, 1985:10; Kelly, 1977:18; Lindquist, 1975:89; Rogers, 1983:55)*

However, Rogers (1983:55) warns against assuming that the 'powers-that-be' will necessarily oppose innovation. Some educators may hide behind this assumption to justify their own lack of initiative. Other authors are also optimistic that major strides can be made even in conventional institutions. *(Boud, 1981b:29; Lindquist, 1975:89; Stephenson, 1986:14)*

> Even in hegemonic institutions, open spaces can be found wherein educators play upon the system's embedded contradictions and align themselves with movements for change. (Heaney & Horton, 1990:94-5)

In our experience, there are definitely 'spaces' in conventional institutions which can be prised open for innovations. However, the support and advice of some key senior staff is essential to lend credibility to unconventional proposals, especially when these are initiated by relatively junior members of staff. Also, innovators must be aware of institutional power struggles and political and financial pressures which they can use to their advantage. As Cowan says:

> ... innovators need to be devious strategists, and to exploit the circumstances of a particular situation. (Cowan, 1988:209)

Institutionalizing An Innovation

Initiating an innovation is a formidable task, but ensuring long-term survival of the innovation is more difficult, especially where it exists in a conventional TDL institution. (Bawden [1988:228] makes the point that traditional universities may be the most resistant to change). An innovation needs to be incorporated into the structure and functioning of its host institution within a short time if it is to survive: it needs to be institutionalized. If it is not institutionalized but merely tolerated as a minor aberration, it is unlikely to be taken seriously by learners or faculty, and may well fail completely. *(Apps, 1987:145; Boud, 1981b:34; Dear & Bartol, 1984:242-243; Higgs et al, 1985:10; McGaghie et al, 1978:80; Whitorn & Cedrone, 1979:83)*

A common barrier to institutionalization is waning enthusiasm among key implementers. Original innovators may be attracted to new positions demanding greater challenge than programme maintenance. This leaves the innovation in the hands of others who may be less committed to the original ideal, and who do not make the same efforts to get the innovation institutionalized. *(Lindquist, 1975:88)*

As Stephenson (1988:224-6) points out, many administrators will baulk at the idea of independent study because they assume it is inefficient and costly – a luxury they cannot afford. His experience at the School of Independent Study at the North East London Polytechnic is very reassuring: they cope with the same staff:student ratio and funding levels as the other departments in the polytechnic. Knowles (1986:45) agrees: he says he can work with as many self-directed learners as teacher-directed ones. But Brookfield warns:

> Unless administrators recognize the successful conduct of self-directed learning formats as a criterion of career advancement, faculty will be penalized for their commitment to helping learners become self-directed at the expense of time for research, scholarly pursuits, and publishing. (Brookfield, 1986:84)

It may be necessary to get external funding for an innovation initially. Funders are often more willing to risk money for an innovation. Once it is established, however, it is obviously important that stable internal funding be guaranteed after a trial period. Ensuring long-term internal funding would be an aspect of institutionalizing the innovation. Institutions have different reasons for incorporating innovations, as Shor notes:

> From the institutional point of view, some experiments may be tolerated, some encouraged for window-dressing or as controlled ghettoes for trouble-making teachers and students, and many will be discouraged by administrative fiat. (Shor, 1980:113)

Is your innovative work being tolerated so that the institution can 'show off' how progressive it is, while maintaining convention in all other respects?

Some courses need approval not only from the institution directly concerned, but also from an external accrediting agency such as a professional council. Rarely, such agencies may grant approval from the outset, almost as an act of faith. More often, they 'wait and see', and only grant accreditation after the innovation is entrenched. This creates tensions in turn. *(Bawden, 1988:231; Cornwall, 1988:248-9; Stephenson, 1986:14-15)*

> Both students and faculty have been affected by the constant scrutiny under which [the innovation] has developed. Faculty have faced several institutional reviews and have often had to defend their institution to unsupportive professional colleagues. (Whitorn & Cedrone, 1979:76)

Provide Protection For Vulnerable Innovations

While ensuring long-term survival through institutionalization, you need to take care that your programme does not become unduly bureaucratized or that its unique features do not become so diluted that the innovation is effectively co-opted. The tendency in a conventional institution is to get everything to conform to existing structures. While this is quite understandable, administrators have to compromise to some extent if innovations in their institutions are to survive. In Chapter 8 we discussed the need to get rules about examinations and tests changed in the case of SDL courses, for example. *(Apps, 1987:145; Boud, 1988a:38; Cornwall, 1988:246; Shelton, 1981; Whitorn & Cedrone, 1979:77)*

> One of our guiding principles has been that our resource and administrative arrangements should derive from our educational principles, ie in response to student needs, and not the other way round. (Stephenson, 1988:225)

If you are responsible for research about and evaluation of the course you are co-ordinating, then another challenge is to do research which is philosophically consistent with self-directed learning principles. *(Hammond, forthcoming; Reason, 1988; Reason & Rowan, 1981)*

Did you think of other ideas to overcome institutional constraints on critical SDL?

Overcoming Faculty Constraints On Critical SDL

How might the faculty in your institution present barriers to critical SDL, and how could you overcome these problems?

Prevent Faculty 'Perversion' Of Critical SDL

Staff who have been pressurized to change their practice, lack theoretical understanding of critical SDL, or are not committed to broader social goals of equality, democracy and justice, may try to adopt SDL as one of many possible 'teaching techniques'. There is then a risk of what we call 'perversion of a progressive concept' occurring in practice. It has been one of our major objectives in writing this book to alert readers to potential perversions at each stage in the critical SDL process. The commonest perversion is faculty trying to retain or regain control over the teaching-learning situation. Some will use the slightest excuse to go back to more familiar controlling behaviours, even to the extent of twisting learners' inquiries so that they can justify their behaviour as a 'response to a learner's request'. *(Shelton, 1981:169; Stephenson, 1988:223)*

> While writing this paper [I remembered speaking to a former college principal]. He said '... no matter how carefully planned an alternative approach may be, the staff will sooner or later bring it back into line'. I hope he is wrong. (Shelton, 1981:184)

Prevent Faculty From Abrogating Responsibility

> Autonomy [in learning] cannot be developed if teachers deny their competence and authority and abrogate their responsibility for facilitating learning. (Boud, 1981b:28)

A facilitator who assumes that critical SDL can succeed without orientation of learners accustomed to TDL is either naive or deliberately wanting the process to fail. Throughout the book, we have provided ideas and strategies which co-ordinators can use at each stage of the critical SDL process to orientate learners and to help them take fuller control of their own learning.

Try To Sustain Initial Enthusiasm

Assuming that educators do not deliberately pervert the critical SDL process, and are committed to it in principle, declining enthusiasm may still mean that the process breaks down in practice. This problem may arise either due to the pressures of administering a more complex system than TDL, or inadequate rewards. As we discussed in Chapter 6, SDL is more complex to administer than TDL, and so faculty need time and mental preparation to cope with this. They also deserve appropriate recognition for their work. *(Boud, 1981b:27; Bradley, 1975:71-3; Brookfield, 1986:84; Lindquist, 1975:88; Tompkins & McGraw, 1988:190)*

Prevent Sabotage By Obstructive Colleagues

> It is wise for the would-be educational innovator to be fully aware that many of his colleagues are going to be less than enthusiastic about innovation.... (Cornwall, 1981:195)

Kelly (1977:18) goes further and refers to 'sabotage' of innovations by educators who feel threatened by them, and Bawden (1988:235) faced a 'never-ending circuit – from one group of sceptics to another' when introducing change at one institution.

Can you think of ways to prevent such 'sabotage'?

Some colleagues might find innovators 'secretive and elitist' (Bawden, 1988:234), so the negative effects of obstructive colleagues might be minimized by involving them in the process of curriculum change. In our experience, this sometimes works, but occasionally the strategy backfires: through involvement, the threatened colleague gets more information and therefore more power to lobby against the innovation. *(Kelly, 1977:18-19; Quinn, 1980:105)*

It may help to try to anticipate the criticisms that your conservative colleagues may raise, and to answer them before they raise them themselves. For example, when you first present your proposal, you could say: 'Of course, the argument against this idea that is often made by conventional educators is.... However, it has been found that the opposite is in fact more likely to occur'. If you can back up your arguments with research or quotations from internationally respected authors, negative colleagues will have difficulty trying to discredit you. Another strategy is to work hard to win the support of neutral colleagues, and to make supportive ones into outright enthusiasts. In this way, the position of the critics can be progressively weakened. *(Knowles, 1986:72)*

Did you think of other strategies to prevent obstruction or sabotage?

Developing Appropriate Administrative Structures

> Just because traditional education was a matter of routine in which plans and programs were handed down from the past, it does not follow that progressive education is a matter of planless improvisation. (Dewey, 1938:18)

Co-ordinators need a clearly thought out framework or structure within which SDL can occur, and within which it will be protected against the perversions we have mentioned. What are some of the elements of a desirable structure?

> The general features of a framework or structure for independent learning are as follows:
>
> 1. clearly defined goals
> 2. availability of the necessary material and human resources
> 3. an understanding of the roles and responsibilities of both the teacher and the students
> 4. arrangements by which both parties can be prepared for the new demands to be imposed on them...
> 5. means by which the success of the course can be checked as it proceeds and if necessary changed without bureaucratic snags. (Cornwall, 1988:246)

As Rogers (1983:54) emphasizes, where suitable structures have not yet been devised for SDL, the educator will need to try different approaches, relying very much on personal judgement of what the learning group requires in the way of formalized procedures and structures.

Although we made efforts to read about the administration of SDL before we began co-ordinating a self-directed course, not much of practical use was available. Systems just had to be set up as the course progressed. Many authors have commented in passing that SDL is 'complex to administer', but few have discussed how the complexity can best be tackled. We do not believe it is either possible or desirable to standardize systems for SDL. However, reading about the problems experienced and solutions tried by others may stimulate educators wanting to implement SDL. This is the reason we have tried to pull our thoughts and experiences together in this book.

The need for a structure which will place the learners in control of their own learning and yet make co-ordination a manageable task is crucial. Some general plans can be made by the co-ordinator in advance of the learning group being constituted, but many of the details can and should be negotiated with participants themselves. In our work co-ordinating a critical SDL course for primary healthcare (PHC) educators, participants were only limited by two things: first, the essential competencies of an effective PHC educator (which they helped to generate – see Chapter 3); and second, some pre-determined, formal institutional requirements (eg that participants should be practising PHC educators; that the course would be a part-time, self-directed one). Between these limits, however, there was plenty of scope for individual learners to design a unique learning experience for themselves. We do not apologize for the existence of some pre-determined course requirements or 'givens' (see Higgs, 1988:54-5; Tompkins & McGraw, 1988:177), such as that the course will be conducted as a SDL one; that learners will be expected to be active in self- and peer-evaluation and so on. Torbert (1978) refers to the paradoxical notion of 'liberating structures': the very constraints imposed on learners may in fact liberate them to pursue learning in a new way. As Heron says:

> If absolutely everything is negotiable, then the negotiator stands for nothing, is not committed to any principles or values, in short, is not really educated.... [T]here will be some parts of the educational process which will be non-negotiable because they exemplify principles to which staff are committed. (Heron, 1988:78-9, 84)

As long as prospective participants are informed about 'givens' in advance, co-ordinators have every right to determine what kind of course they plan to offer (we say 'plan to offer', because our plans always alter to at least some extent once the learning group assembles and exerts its unique influences), and learners can then decide whether to participate or not.

The 'freedom to learn' (Rogers, 1983) which critical SDL affords contrasts starkly with the pre-determined structure of a TDL course. In TDL, the 'dose' of education required by the whole learning group has been pre-determined by someone in authority, and all the learners have to do is swallow the educational pill compliantly. Some of the effects may be therapeutic, but many side-effects (such as learning to play shallow educational games, and being competitive with peers) must be accepted as well. Some learners may have an allergic reaction, and others will find that the pill was an inappropriate prescription for their particular learning needs.

Did you think of other faculty-related constraints you may have to overcome? Apart from institutional and faculty-related constraints on SDL, the many learner-related constraints discussed in previous chapters must also be borne in mind. We hope that the strategies mentioned previously to assist learners to adapt to the challenging role demanded of them in critical SDL will be useful for other SDL co-ordinators.

Practical Exercises And Issues For Review

You may find it useful to review your learning by working through some of these exercises and questions, or others which you have thought of as you have been reading.

1. Next time you have to facilitate a group session, try to plan, implement and evaluate it in the way that a 'participatory researcher' or animator would, rather than as a 'teacher' or 'educator' would. If possible, tape-record or video the session, and afterwards, consciously reflect on how you felt and how participants responded. If you feel positive about the session, try to identify aspects that could be improved on in future. Is this a 'role re-conceptualization' you feel comfortable with? If PR does not attract you, what alternative role would be more appropriate?
2. If you know someone whose practice as an educator is progressive and whom you admire, ask her/him if you can join some of the sessions s/he facilitates to get ideas for improving your own practice. You may also want to ask this person to join some of your sessions to give you feedback. (Would you open yourself to such peer-evaluation? Why/not?)
3. Whose liberation must come first: the educator's or the learner's? Why do you answer as you do?
4. What institutional barriers to educational innovation are you most likely to face in your situation? What strategies could you use to overcome each?
5. What faculty-related barriers are you likely to face? Which of your colleagues are likely to be supportive, neutral, and negative? Depending on your answer, is it worth the effort of trying to introduce change in your situation? Would it be more strategic to make small changes in the work you personally do, but not to discuss this openly at departmental level? Would such changes ever be significant? Have you the energy to lobby, argue, motivate, explain and cajole enough to get major changes accepted?
6. What administrative structure would be appropriate in your situation to maximize learner control while still reassuring yourself and the accreditors that academic standards will be maintained?
7. Draft a document for your head of department and the principal/dean to consider. Clearly state what educational changes you are proposing, why, who it will involve, and how, where and when it will be implemented and evaluated. You may find it useful to ask the relevant officer (eg a faculty secretary) for a copy of the form you have to complete if you propose starting a new course. The kinds of details required there may stimulate your thinking even if you are proposing changes to an existing course.
8. Imagine that you are in a position to make progressive policy changes in your department, and others will have to implement them. However, most of the others are conservative and cling to their traditional roles of authority over learners. Would you make the policy changes and hope that 'perversions' do not occur in practice; or would you not make the changes, feeling that the likelihood of perversions is too great, and fearing the effects of such perversions on the learners? Whatever your answer, what else would you do in that position to try to bring about progressive educational change?
9. Now, imagine that your proposal to start a critical SDL course in a conventional institution has been accepted. You hear some feedback about what was said in a committee meeting, and realize that the only reason your proposal has been accepted is because the institution has been under severe pressure from community groups and the students' council to offer more 'relevant' and 'socially responsive' courses. Your course will be used to silence the critics, and everyone else will be left in peace to do what they have always done in the past. You personally agree with the critics that the institution as a whole needs a radical change of direction. Will you go ahead with your plans? Why/not? In either event, what will you do to encourage broader institutional change?
10. Interview someone who has successfully introduced an educational innovation, either at your own or at another institution. Also, interview someone who tried but failed to have her/his proposals implemented. Draw whatever lessons you can from their experiences. If personal contacts are not available, try the next best thing and read the accounts of other educators. We found the resources by Boud (1981, 1988), Knowles and his associates (1984, 1986), Rogers (1983) and Vermilye (1975) to be especially useful.

Conclusion

In this final chapter we have argued that to be effective as critical SDL co-ordinators, we need to radically re-conceptualize our roles, and develop insight into and strategies to overcome a variety of institutional and faculty-related constraints we may face in our work. In addition, however, we need skills to cope with our day-to-day work. We have specified some of the detailed competencies needed by critical SDL co-ordinators in the self-assessment exercises at the start of each chapter. You may want to return to the self-assessment exercise at the start of this chapter now, to see whether you still have learning needs to meet.

Without a doubt, co-ordinating a critical SDL course is simultaneously the most frustrating, scary, exhausting and exhilarating educational work we have ever done. Would we recommend it to others? Definitely! Perhaps some of the insights and ideas you have gained in working through the book will make your initial experiences a bit less frustrating, scary and exhausting than ours. But be assured: nothing we have said will detract from your exhilaration when you discover your own freedom and power in the very act of liberating learners from conventional constraints and sharing educational power with them.

Epilogue

> ... there is no neutral education. Education is either for domestication or for freedom. Although it is customarily conceived as a conditioning process, education can equally be an instrument for de-conditioning. An initial choice is required of the educator. (Coutinho in Freire, 1970b:vi)

We have seen for ourselves what can in fact be achieved once we had made that 'initial choice'. Making such a choice requires political commitment. However, many potentially liberating innovations become 'perverted' in reality because the innovators lack either the awareness or the skills to put their theories into consistent practice. The guiding question we have used to evaluate our own, often flawed, practice is: Will implementation of this plan or idea put more control into learners' hands, or will it put us as co-ordinators back in control? The tendency is almost always for control to be subtly or unsubtly re-directed away from learners and back to where it has conventionally belonged - with educators. The challenge facing us all is to consistently and forcefully resist this tendency. In every society, the struggle for education is not merely a struggle for knowledge or learning. It is essentially about power and control. It is part of a much broader struggle for justice, equality and freedom for all. We as educators who espouse these ideals should at least ensure that the learners with whom we work experience power and control over their own learning as a first step.

Is liberatory education a question of all-or-nothing? Clearly not. The edited volumes by Boud (1981, 1988) which have been extensively quoted and referred to throughout this book are entitled: *'Developing* student autonomy in learning' (our emphasis). In our work with other educators, we have seen how small steps often lead much further as confidence and conviction increases. Every step in the right direction is a step worth taking. However, many educators set their sights too low and miss opportunities to liberate learners and themselves in much more fundamental ways. Kriel, writing about the need for paradigmatic changes in medical education writes:

> ... fiddling with the [medical] curriculum is the educational equivalent of Nero's fiddling while Rome burnt. (Kriel, 1987:16)

There is a major leap to be taken if learning is to be empowering rather than domesticating. It is negligent for educators to advocate empowerment but to delay making the leap while they merely fiddle. Do you feel tempted to break loose from the constraints of teacher-directed learning and to help others do so too? If so, we urge you to take the leap. We found immense satisfaction in letting go of roles which had stunted us and the learners with

whom we worked. The freer others in the self-directed learning groups became, the freer *we* became. We all helped to liberate and transform ourselves and each other. And having done so, we feel more committed to pursuing the cause of human liberation in other settings - both inside and outside the educational system.

To be sure, educational transformation is not as simple as making an 'initial choice'. The implications of that choice have to be considered and appropriate strategies adopted to achieve the desired results. Of course, the more you can prepare yourself beforehand, the more confident you are likely to be in trying out a new role and walking a new path. We hope that the discussions and reflections included here will alert you to potential problems to avoid, and stimulate your thinking about possible strategies you might adopt to keep your educational practice consistent with your philosophy. But the experience of others can never be as powerful as your own, so don't put off making the leap into critical self-directed learning because you feel too unprepared. With hindsight, we now realize that we only really started 'believing' in self-directed learning once we saw it working in practice. All the reading and preparation beforehand only provided us with the motivation to try it for ourselves. You, too, may only discover the essence of the ideal which you espouse once you actually start practising liberatory education.

With all that said, then, go ahead - and good luck.

A note about evaluation of this book: We would very much appreciate your feedback about the content and/or process of this book. Please send any comments to us c/o the publisher: Kogan Page Ltd, 120 Pentonville Rd, London N1 9JN, United Kingdom.

Appendix 1: Group Process Self-Assessment

This self-assessment exercise was preceded by a handout about content (what the group is discussing) and process (how the group is discussing). We discussed the concept of group process, and asked those present to reflect on their experience of group process (eg speaking order and frequency, facial expresssions, eye contact etc).

Self Assessment About Group Process

1. I participate actively in group discussions

YES NO

1.1 I tend to dominate discussions, and want to be less dominant	1.2 I have more to contribute and would like to be more active
YES ↓ NO ↓ Please go to question 2.	YES ↓ NO ↓ Please go to question 2.
a) What can I do by myself to decrease my domination?	a) What can I do by myself to improve my participation?
b) What help can I ask from the co-ordinators?	b) What help can I ask from the co-ordinators?
c) What help can I ask from others, and who can I ask?	c) What help can I ask from others, and who can I ask?

2. I can express myself clearly and effectively in group discussions

YES ↓ Please go to next section.

NO

a) What can I do by myself to improve this?
b) What help can I ask from the co-ordinators?
c) What help can I ask from others, and who can I ask?

Now, on a scale of 1-5 where 1 means 'very poorly' or 'very seldom', and 5 means 'very well' or 'very often', please rate your own usual behaviour in a group discussion.

• I actively try to create opportunities for others to speak.	
• I help others to say what they are trying to say, not what I would like them to say!	
• I accept the feelings of others without undermining them or diminishing them.	
• I am supportive rather than competitive.	
• I take responsibility for my own feelings and express them in the group without hurting others, but still remaining true to myself. (For example, by saying 'I am feeling a bit frustrated by the way we are handling this' or 'I'm exhausted and propose that we take a break now'.)	
• I am aware of the behaviour of others and of myself in the group.	

Appendix 2: Personal Letters

These are extracts from a personal letter written by a course participant, and from our reply to her. The self-assessment exercise about group process (see Appendix 1) is what prompted her to write.

Dear Rob and Merryl,

As you will see from my self-assessment form, I have been very honest with myself. Unfortunately I can't say with certainty whether my problems are due to language or my own personality: I find it difficult to express myself, not only in English but even in my African mother tongue. In discussions, I tend to listen and not participate. I am not an initiator at all and never have been one.

The question is what should I do to participate more actively in discussions? I need a lot of advice and guidance from you guys! I know your question will be, 'What do you think you should do?' My answer is I really don't know. I am at my wits' end.... (Letter continues.)

Dear Anon,

Thanks so much for your letter - we really enjoyed hearing from you. You have asked for some ideas about how to improve your participation in group discussions. Shall we try?

Your written expression is excellent. Is this perhaps because you don't get shy and confused when you write; or because you have a bit of extra time to think before you start? If it is the latter that is causing a problem in discussion, you may want to try scribbling a few notes as you think, then re-order them, and only then start speaking. We both find this technique useful, especially when we are getting emotionally involved in a 'heated' discussion! Another thing is to check out with people in the group whether you have made yourself clear, and if they say no, then allow yourself the time to think for a moment before you try again. *Know* that you have something important to say; *know* that others are interested in it; *know* that we all have a lot to learn from you. And know also that you can do it and do it well. Don't build up a complex about being unclear - that is the exception, not the rule.

(Letter continues with ideas about practising participation in as many settings as possible, and a suggestion to use a tape recorder in some discussions to help her 'diagnose' her problem more clearly, so that her 'treatment' will be most appropriate.)

Appendix 3: From Description To Analysis

These are extracts from a handout we prepared for learners inexperienced in critical analysis.

Critical Writing: From Description To Analysis

On this course, you are expected to think critically, express yourself clearly, and to contribute new ideas. It is not enough merely to *describe* what you read, observe, or hear. Rather, we need to *analyse* issues, events and ideas. Another way of putting this is to say: We need to ask critical questions.

> In formal education usually teachers ask the questions and you provide the answers. (Marshall & Rowland, 1981:36)

So it follows that one of the skills a self-directed learner needs is the ability to formulate her/his own questions.

What questions should I ask?

It is most useful to ask *what, how, who, where, when and why* when you want to analyse any situation. The most important of all is *why*, and as Werner & Bower (1982:26-3) suggest, *but why?*

> 'Why' is one of the most important questions you can ask, especially if it enables you to identify assumptions which may be hidden. As an example of this, debates about education frequently ask 'How can we do this particular thing better?' while the question 'Why are we doing it in the first place?' is not dealt with. (Marshall & Rowland, 1981:39)

Descriptive versus analytic statements

Most learners initially struggle with the transition from description to analysis. Why? Because we have seldom been encouraged to analyse issues in the past. Our conventional schooling seems to have been specially designed to *prevent* us from analysing and being critical about our situations.

Please look at the two descriptive statements below, then add a third of your own about something that is of interest to you. Remember that a descriptive statement simply describes or portrays a situation or event.

Descriptive Statement 1:
Mobeni Hospital serves six residential clinics.

Descriptive Statement 2:
Each clinic is staffed by one registered nurse and two nursing assistants.

Descriptive Statement 3:
....

Now, let us assume that we have to analyse the health services in the Mobeni area. We have started well by *describing* certain key features. (And we mustn't gloss over the importance of a good description: if your initial description is not accurate, your whole analysis may be invalid.) But the next step is to ask: what, how, who, where, when, and why? Before reading further, please look back at the first descriptive statement above and use the questioning technique to see if you can add some related analytic statements.

Did you try asking questions such as:

- What clinic services are offered? What medical supplies are available in the clinics? What community-outreach programmes are offered?
- How are the clinics maintained; how are they meeting community needs?
- Who attends the clinics (and who does not)? Who staffs them? Who supervises the staff there?
- Where are the clinics situated in relation to the hospital and the villages in the region? Where do staff live?
- When do the clinics operate (do they offer a 24-hour emergency service)? When do new supplies arrive? When are in-service sessions for staff arranged?
- Why are there only six clinics in such a large region? Why is there no functioning clinic committee?

There is no single 'correct analysis', since so much depends first on the specific questions you ask, and second, on how you respond to each answer. (For example, some health workers think that every village needs a 24-hour service; others believe that this is unrealistic, and consider an eight-hour service to be adequate). Bearing that in mind, here are some examples of analytic statements based on the first descriptive statement above.

Analytic Statements

Mobeni Hospital serves six residential clinics. This is insufficient to provide accessible health services to the whole population: many villagers have to travel ten or even 15km to reach a clinic, not the five kilometre maximum recommended by the World Health Organization. Funding for rural health services is chronically inadequate, but in addition, priority has been given in recent years to renovations at the hospital rather than to clinic development. The clinic buildings are thus in need of maintenance and repair....

Is the distinction between a descriptive and an analytic statement clear? Let's now try the same exercise for the second descriptive statement above. Please try to add some analytic statements about the staffing at the clinic before you read ours below. (Handout continues with more examples, practical exercises, and suggested readings, including Hammond [1986a, b, c, d]; Hope and Timmel [1984a, b, c]; Marshall and Rowland [1981]; and Werner and Bower [1982].)

Appendix 4: Learning Objectives

These are extracts from a handout we designed for self-directed learners after we had seen how much unnecessary confusion a previous group had suffered in the process of drafting their learning agreements.

Phrasing Useful Learning Objectives

What are the objectives of this handout? Having worked through it, you should be able to:

1. *name and explain the five elements of a learning objective for self-directed learners;*
2. *set a learning objective in which all the elements relate to each other; and*
3. *give useful feedback to a learner who has set an inadequate objective.*

What is a learning objective?

Question 1: Could you say what you understand a learning objective to be, as if you wanted to explain it to someone else?

Different people define it differently, but we have found it useful to define a learning objective as a statement about what a learner will be able to do at the end of a learning period that s/he could not do beforehand.

Question 2: Most people who have used learning objectives agree that a simple statement of *what* a learner should be able to do (ie the *content* of their learning) is not enough to make the objective a useful tool for planning, implementing and evaluating learning. Can you think of some other things that could be added?

We might ask how the learning will occur (ie under what conditions) and how well it should be learned (to what extent?). Did you think of other ideas? Educators who favour the use of behavioural objectives say that an objective should include a statement of *activity, content, conditions and criteria*. In the case of a self-directed learner who is setting her/his own objectives, we have found a statement about *evidence* to be essential as well. Let us now look at an example of an objective to see how each of these elements works with the others.

What are the elements of a learning objective?

Please look at the following example of an objective about setting objectives. The objective appears in the left-hand column, and some issues and questions are phrased alongside to draw your attention to aspects which have caused other learners difficulties.

Example of a learning objective

Conditions: By (specific date), given: a) my participation in the scheduled workshop about objectives, b) that I have worked through the supplied handout on objectives, and c) that I have tried writing and critiquing at least three learning objectives	• Did you set a realistic, feasible deadline? • Are you answering: 'Under what conditions am I operating?' (Using what time, what human and material resources, and having completed what tasks?) • Do the conditions and tasks relate directly to the act and content of your objective?
Act: I will be able to WRITE	• Here we ask: 'What will I be able to do?' The act must be phrased in a measurable way; we must be able to demonstrate that we can do it! Clear action verbs are best. • Beware of making one objective too complex: one action verb is best. (With two in the same objective, it's often hard to think of appropriate criteria or relevant evidence for both.)
Content: five learning objectives	
Criteria: to the extent that: a) they are feasible and relevant, b) they include the five elements of an objective and c) the elements all relate directly to each other.	• For criteria or standards we ask: 'How well must I do the act?' (Or how much, or to what measurable extent?) • The criteria must relate directly to the act and content.
Evidence: five written objectives judged by a fellow-learner to be acceptable according to my self-defined criteria.	• Here we ask: 'How can I prove that I can do the act I specified?' • The evidence must relate directly to the act, content and criteria.

Question 3: Can you list at least five questions you might use as a checklist to assess the adequacy and usefulness of an objective?

You may have other ideas to add to these:

- Is the objective relevant?
- Is it feasible?
- Is it measurable?
- Are the conditions appropriate and realistic?
- Are the learning resources suitable?
- Are the act and content clearly phrased?
- Are the criteria specific, clear, and convincing and do they relate directly to the act and content?
- Is the evidence appropriate and does it relate directly to the act and content?

Objectives for each learning domain

There are three learning domains: knowledge (cognitive domain), attitudes (affective domain) and skills (psychomotor domain). Within the cognitive domain, we can distinguish between low-level (eg memorizing, simple recall) and high-level (eg analysis, problem-solving, synthesis, evaluation) cognitive functions.

People often focus on the low-level cognitive domain and on skills when they set objectives, neglecting the affective and high-level cognitive domains. This is something to avoid if you hope to become 'fuller' and more critical in the course of your self-directed learning.

Question 4: Can you list some of the action verbs you might use in a learning objective concerned with low-level knowledge?

You will have thought of others, but these are some commonly used ones: list, name, describe, define, label, write....

Question 5: Now, can you list some verbs you might use to get at high-level cognitive functions?

Analyse, debate, argue, assess, evaluate, criticize, defend, examine, formulate, justify, plan....

Please try to keep this issue of a balance between domains in mind when you set learning objectives. We will also focus in a future session on how different learning-teaching techniques are more effective in achieving objectives set for the different domains. For example, if you are trying to develop a practical skill, practice is essential. At this stage, you should have enough background to start phrasing your own learning objectives based on the self-assessment you have already completed. Let us try this next.

Phrasing a learning objective

Please write a learning objective for one of your priority learning needs in the space below.

Conditions:

Act:

Content:

Criteria:

Evidence:

Now, please refer back to the checklist of issues to consider when evaluating learning objectives, and see whether you need to make any changes to your objective. Do you see why each element (act, content etc) is necessary? Could any one of them have been omitted and still leave you with a useful objective?

Giving constructive criticism about objectives

We need to be able to critique our own objectives and those of peers and learners. Assuming that we are learners asking for your input, please give us some feedback on this objective. (Our own critical comments appear below.)

> **Conditions:** By (specific date), given a) attendance at a workshop on teaching methods and b) that we have read *Teaching for better learning* by Abbatt (1980)
>
> **Act and content:** we will be able to set learning objectives
>
> **Criteria:** very effectively.
>
> **Evidence:** 1) Examples of three learning objectives; 2) Summary of Abbatt's book.

When you have found all the problems in this example and re-phrased them, please compare your feedback with ours below.

> **Conditions:** It's good that a deadline is stated, but both the other conditions or tasks listed seem irrelevant: they do not relate directly to the act and content of this objective. A workshop about teaching methods will not help with learning to set objectives, and Abbatt's book does not deal with learning objectives at all.
>
> **Act and content:** This part is fine – it is usually the easiest part of an objective to write!
>
> **Criteria:** The question to ask here is: 'Does this tell us, in a measurable sense, how well the objectives will be set?' The phrase 'very effectively' is not measurable. No external judge or validator could be expected to make a fair assessment about whether we have achieved this objective if this is the only guidance we give. The criteria should be so specific that they can be used as a kind of 'mark schedule' or checklist to evaluate our competency.
>
> **Evidence:** The first part is excellent. It relates directly to the act and content. But the second is totally irrelevant and should be omitted.

Did you think of other ideas to improve the objective above? Do you think you will be able to give honest but tactful feedback to peers and learners about their objectives? If not, how could you develop this necessary skill?

Conclusion

Please look back at the objectives for this handout we stated at the outset and see whether you feel confident about each of them. If so, then good luck as you draft your own objectives and help others to do so too. If not, or if you have any other issues about this topic you'd like to raise with us or the learning group as a whole, please let us know.

Appendix 5: Open Letters

These are extracts from 'open letters' we wrote to the learning group during their orientation period. For extracts from personal letters written by and to an individual participant, see Appendix 2.

Dear All,

Yesterday afternoon, we were all struggling to identify the steps we need to follow in designing a personal curriculum. Do you remember the time? People in each of the small groups had done remarkably well in listing on newsprint the steps they thought were important. We were really impressed with the way you had all coped with the task. So why did we not *say* so? Why did we begin the long discussion to reach consensus before we had stopped to congratulate you all on your work; to reassure you? Can you think why not?

Perhaps for two reasons. The first is simply that we all make mistakes sometimes! (Letter continues: 'One of us was busy ... while the other was ...' – a factual account of what was going on for us at the time, perhaps trying to justify our lack of appropriate action!) We both failed miserably in that moment to play the role of supporter for you. We can only apologize and hope that we can learn by thinking and writing about this incident.

So the one reason we did not congratulate you all was simple 'facilitator error'. The other reason is closely related. How does a facilitator give positive feedback to a group of adults without patronizing them? Has it ever happened to you that ... (Letter continues with a scenario where praise becomes potentially patronizing.) If you have ever experienced something like this, then maybe you can understand how difficult we sometimes find it to express our positive feedback. There is such a thin line between not praising learners enough, and patronizing them with praise.

Dear All,

On Wednesday, three days into the orientation period, we said that we would have to adapt the planned programme a bit. Some of the climate-building exercises had taken longer than scheduled, so others would have to be omitted. After tea, Anon said that she had spoken to a few others, and the feeling was that we should rather extend the climate-building phase instead of leaving out some exercises. How exciting for us to realize that the arbitrary decision we had taken for the whole group had been recognized as such, and that you felt confident enough to challenge it. Thank you for bringing us back to reality like that, and please continue to do so whenever necessary! (Letter continues.)

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